

CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO MISSION ORDERS
PHILOSOPHY IN THE U.S. ARMY

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Art of War Scholars

by

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ABSTRACT

CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO MISSION ORDERS PHILOSOPHY IN THE U.S. ARMY, by Major Robert M. M. Gichert, 106 pages.

Doctrine 2015 places special emphasis on Mission Command, a modern euphemism for a familiar concept—mission orders philosophy. Recent professional writers have pointed to the continuity in this call to mission orders, citing elements of it as early as the Army's first capstone doctrine in 1905. However, this begs the question: why has a doctrinally espoused value taken over a century to take hold?

This study uses a historical perspective to dissect the cultural beliefs that drive the behavior of command philosophy. Focused on the pre-World War I army, the interwar army, and the army of the 1980s, the study identifies three underlying assumptions contributing to the adoption of a command philosophy. The expectations of future combat, behavioral expectations of commanders, and behavioral expectations of subordinates all contribute to the practice of a command philosophy. This conceptual framework is useful in examining why a mission orders philosophy has required repeated emphasis in the Army and spanned decades. It is an effort to better understand the current implementation of this philosophy and inform study of today's doctrine.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
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| AEF | American Expeditionary Force |
| FM | Field Manual |
| FSR | Field Service Regulations |
| NTC | National Training Center |
| U.S. | United States |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2012 General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, released a white paper directing the adoption of mission command across the joint force. He stated, “mission command is critical to our future success.”¹ He continued, “Joint and service doctrine, education and training are keys to achieving the habit of mission command; our doctrine must describe it, our schools must teach it, and we must train individually and collectively to it.”² This directive is not a change to existing army policy or doctrine. Mission command is a current expression of a mission orders philosophy. Doctrinally the army has long advocated elements of a mission orders philosophy. As early as 1905 the *Field Service Regulations*, (*FSR*) cautioned:

An order should not trespass on the province of the subordinate. It should contain everything which is beyond the independent authority of the subordinate, but nothing more. When the transmission of orders involves a considerable period of time, during which the situation may change, detailed instructions are to be avoided. The same rule holds when orders may have to be carried out under circumstances which the originator of the order cannot completely forecast; in such cases letters of guidance is more appropriate. It should lay stress on the object to be attained, and leave open the means to be employed.³

The keystone elements of a mission orders philosophy are operating within the commander’s intent and allowing subordinates the latitude to excel in uncertain circumstances. These elements have been doctrinal for over a hundred years. Therefore,

¹Martin E. Dempsey, “Mission Command,” *White Paper* (3 April 2012), 3.

²*Ibid.*, 6.

³Clinton Ancker III, “Evolution of Mission Command,” *Military Review* (March-April 2013): 43.

the chairman's instructions are less a change in direction, and more an effort to reenergize movement toward a more mission orders based execution.

This seems counterintuitive, why has a doctrinally espoused value required over a hundred years to inculcate? Why does the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs need to emphasize a directive that appeared in our first capstone doctrine? Clearly, the Army is capable of massive change. During the same period, the Army has adjusted from a small professional force to a massive draft army and back multiple times, fought on five continents, and integrated races, genders, and lifestyles into the force. However, identifiable efforts to implement the philosophy have failed to achieve permanence and tensions in the operating command philosophy are still evident. General Raymond Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army, offered a simple answer in his address to the Command and General Staff College, "[It's] easy to say but hard to do."⁴ Reading into his justification for adopting a mission orders philosophy provides insight. He describes "sweeping changes" that have had significant effects on the world:

[A] shift from linear to non-linear battle fields, . . . [we must] prepare for peer competitors but also irregular forces with advanced capabilities . . . [the future is] too complex and our Soldiers and leaders too talented to attempt to operate in this environment through centralized command and control. Intent based mission command accounts for this complexity by empowering subordinate leaders to act within the parameters of the commander's intent.⁵

He describes a contemporary translation of the 1905 *FSR* end state. However, he provides a great deal of justification for why the Army must implement this change. His reasoned

⁴Raymond Odierno, taped address to Command and General Staff College for Summer 2013 Mission Command Week, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z211I8hY9Wo> (accessed 28 July 2013).

⁵*Ibid.*

and rational argument suggests that he expects continued resistance to implementing a mission orders philosophy.

General Odierno's rationale for adopting a mission orders philosophy intrigued me. Through my experiences as an active duty leader in a National Guard element, advisor to an Iraqi battalion, and commander of grievously wounded soldiers in recovery, I have become convinced that addressing the beliefs of subordinates and aligning your message to meet the expectations demanded by those beliefs is a critical part of leadership. Furthermore, the more we ask as leaders, the more we must ensure we have phrased the request to draw support from deeply held beliefs. With this in mind, I began a study to answer why has it taken multiple efforts and decades to implement a mission orders philosophy in the United States (U.S.) Army.

Historical and contemporary resistance to mission orders philosophy requires an understanding of what mission orders philosophy is. This has been a subject of enormous debate and the inclusion of tangential issues only expands and intensifies the deliberation. For the purposes of this study, an examination of the essence of mission orders philosophy will be used. Its essence is a belief that the best results in combat are obtained when leaders at all levels determine how to accomplish the tasks their superior has allotted for them. It is crucial to note that it is a belief and not a certainty. The genesis of explaining its century of implementation in the U.S. Army begins with an acknowledgement that it is the adoption of an uncertain solution to perhaps the most chaotic of human endeavors, combat. General Odierno's concern for resistance is from a separate belief; a separate theory that also proposes to bring success on the battlefield.

To borrow from Clausewitz, if mission orders philosophy is our thesis, we must study its antithesis. Centralized command is this alternative. It is characterized by specific tasks, instructions for the accomplishment of directives, and inflexibility. However, it is not without its own advantages; it is easier and less expensive in time and resources. It proposes to reduce mistakes, measured in lives and resources, by empowering the senior commander. Further, it can greatly simplify coordination across the chain of command and logistical support. Additionally, commands can implement a centralized command philosophy faster across a growing or inexperienced organization. It rests on a belief that the best decision maker, the senior leader, can best control the battlefield and issue appropriate detailed orders to secure victory.

Adding to the complexity of studying these beliefs is the acknowledgement that they cannot be mutually exclusive in the implementation of a functioning command philosophy. In execution, no command system functions without both premises. Personnel, political, personal, and logistical considerations, as well as enemy action and the constraints of time confine all command systems to balance between centralized and mission orders operating principles. The command structure must exist somewhere between the two extremes, and depending on the leader, mission, experience of the unit, and quality of subordinate leaders, a unit and an army may operate at different degrees of centralized and mission order command structures. Critical to this merger of philosophies are a projection of beliefs by the leaders and subordinates involved. Command philosophy is a group behavior based on beliefs. Culture, as a complex system of shared beliefs, provides a plausible explanation for both the anticipated resistance to General

Odierno's arguments, and a means of understanding how the Army reconciles two differing philosophies for securing battlefield success. Establishing a methodology for understanding culture is the first step in examining mission orders philosophy in the Army.

Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept. Dr. Edgar Schein, a leading scholar in organizational culture, has created a construct for analyzing culture, which he describes as, "stability and rigidity in . . . the foundation of the social order that we live in and the rules we abide by" helps to simplify culture's complexity and make sense of when a culture makes seemingly contradictory statements.⁶ Schein's conception of culture explains the impact of culture on behavior in three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs or values, and finally underlying assumptions. At the surface are artifacts, the visible actions and structures of an organization and the individuals within it. Below the visible artifacts are the espoused values and beliefs of the organization: doctrine, instructions, guidance. At the deepest level are underlying assumptions, the framework for interpreting and operating in the world.⁷ This construct is particularly useful as it provides an explanation for multiple efforts to instill or further a mission orders philosophy in the Army. In Schein's construct, doctrinal directives and leader instructions toward a mission orders philosophy are espoused values, and deep seeded underlying assumptions modify and dominate espoused values. This is a critical distinction in the study of command philosophy when discussed it is an espoused value, when practiced it

⁶Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 7.

⁷Ibid., 27-32.

is an expression of cultural assumptions about how to operate in the world. Only an understanding of the underlying assumptions will allow proper perspective on the implementation of espoused values.

Schein asserts that underlying assumptions are, “deeply embedded, unconscious, [and] basic . . . the essence of culture.”⁸ They are the conceptual framework to explain the world and the core of a belief system that clarify how to act within the culture. It is reasonable to conclude that there are other underlying assumptions hindering the implementation of a mission orders philosophy. Unfortunately, because they are so deeply embedded and affect unconscious thought they are rarely expressed. Insights from the artifacts and written espoused values appear infrequently and in multiple sources. They also contain frequent contradictions, and the influence of an underlying assumption is sometimes best expressed in a context that is otherwise irrelevant to a study of command philosophy. To put artifacts and espoused values in context requires a wide review of contemporary sources. Schein asserts that, “if you find some of those basic assumptions and explore their interrelationship, you are really getting at the essence of culture and can then explain a great deal of what goes on. . . . Whereas each one alone might not make sense, the pattern explains the behavior and the success of the organization in overcoming its external and internal challenges.”⁹

Schein’s theories on leadership and culture form the critical first step in methodically assessing why mission orders philosophy has met resistance. His assertion,

⁸Ibid., 28.

⁹Ibid., 53.

“to understand a group’s culture, you must attempt to get at its shared basic assumptions and understand the learning process by which such basic assumptions evolve,” is suggestive that historical perspective would deepen understanding of a behavior heavily modified by culture.¹⁰ This historical perspective produces the second step in the methodology of studying cultural resistance to mission orders. Selecting periods where the Army perceived a need to change and comparing them in time. The distinction of “perceived” reality is important; an actual change in environment is a historical assertion. However, a perceived need for change is a cultural evaluation. First, because these periods of change suggest an increase frequency of artifacts and espoused values that are indicative of underlying assumptions.¹¹ This premise forms the second level of analysis for this study. At least three periods of major change warrant an investigation into the underlying assumptions and their interaction with a mission orders philosophy. Scrutinizing the culture of the American Army at the dawn of its modern professionalization, after the First World War, and during its post-Vietnam renaissance provides insight into why multiple efforts were required to move the culture toward a more mission orders oriented command system.

¹⁰Ibid., 32.

¹¹Schein specifically states that power of underlying assumptions is visible in the culture’s willingness to distort data, deny, distort, or falsify data when underlying assumptions are challenged by events. A historical perspective will reveal attempts to force events into the construct of an underlying assumption. Therefore, during periods of change underlying assumptions are challenged, and their defense will create a means to understand what is driving the culture’s behavior. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 28.

The third step in this study's methodology is to conduct a review of the artifacts and captured espoused value statements from each period that are suggestive of underlying assumptions. Specifically, this study reviewed doctrine, professional journals, structure and curriculum of Army schools, as well as the captured statements of leaders for justifications of behavior or statements that otherwise indicated underlying assumptions modifying command philosophy. These three steps: dissecting culture, identifying comparable periods of change, and delving into the underlying assumptions in practice during the case study, form the methodology of this study.

In addition to Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, two other works influenced and provide alternate perspective on this study. Walter Kretchik's *U.S. Army Doctrine, From the American Revolution to the War on Terror* provided insight and a historical perspective of each piece of doctrine utilized in the case studies for this analysis. Similarly, Eitan Shamir's *Transforming Command* is a comparison study of mission command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies focused on the most recent efforts of those forces. Shamir's work is insightful and provides a differing perspective on mission orders philosophy's struggle that is heavily rooted in Russell Weigley's national ways of war theory. Richard Faulkner's *The School of Hard Knocks* was pivotal to the case study on culture prior to World War I. It focused heavily on the preparation of leaders for the war and was invaluable in identifying what choices were made and what behaviors were emphasized in period of massive change and enormous pressure for the culture. The case study of the Interwar period was heavily influenced by an effort to explain the massive change contained in the second edition of Infantry Journal's *Infantry*

in Battle, published in 1939. This book displays a very different understanding of combat and the enemy than doctrine or other semiofficial military writings before its publication. It is also perhaps, the first professional writing to unapologetically align a vision of uncontrollable combat while maintaining an expectation of the commander to control battle and secure victory. This distinction makes it a pivotal point in the evolution of underlying assumptions that govern command philosophy. A critical source for the formulation of this study's understanding of the interaction of mission orders philosophy and the AirLand battle doctrine is Field Manual (FM) 22-102 *Soldier Team Development*, published in 1987. It has major substantive differences with higher echelon doctrine's arguments for, and description of, mission orders philosophy. Attempting to resolve this conflict was the genesis of this study's argument. Additionally, John Nelson II's 1987 article for *Parameters*, "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle" contains an exceptional synopsis of the intellectual and cultural debate surrounding mission orders philosophy in the period.

Utilizing this methodology across these pivotal sources, and others, reveals a pattern that is suggestive of multiple cultural assumptions interacting and creating a reality that is not conducive to a mission orders philosophy. While these underlying assumptions represent entire networks of belief, it is possible to group these assumptions into three categories: expectations of combat, expectations of commanders, and expectations of subordinates.

The first set of critical underlying assumptions is the projection of beliefs about the nature of combat. Battlefield success is the *raison d'etre* of the Army and the culture

will not support a cultural assumption that conflicts with its conception of combat. At a very simplistic level, this gives credence to the view that an army with a ‘Jominian’ conception of combat would not be able to acknowledge the benefit of a mission orders philosophy.¹² Because without an appreciation of the uncertainty of combat, the increased flexibility and adaptability offered by mission orders would be meaningless. In practice, the degree of uncertainty accepted as unavoidable in combat interacts powerfully with the command philosophy selected to produce the best results in combat. It appears with much more frequency than any other belief in relation to command philosophy. However, it is not the only assumption about combat that modifies the command philosophy in practice. Similarly, conceptions about the ability to impose order on the battlefield, and constructs of the enemy’s capabilities and predilections interact directly with the practiced command philosophy.

The second set of underlying assumptions that are critical for understanding the behavior surrounding adoption of a mission orders philosophy are those that surround the expectations of commanders. Command philosophy is a projection of how best to operate, and requires the application of beliefs on the nature of combat as well as the nature of the force to be employed. Who the commander is, why he is the commander, and how he is expected to behave to fulfill his duties are powerful drivers of behavior in

¹²Antonie-Henri Jomini an influential military theorist who argued, “That strategy is the key to warfare” and that “That all strategy is controlled by invariable scientific principles.” His writings have developed into a school of thought bearing his name. Others frequently attribute his theories with the premise that warfare is a scientific and rational endeavor. However, the school of thought that bears his name frequently takes his theories beyond what can be isolated in his text. John Shy, “Jomini,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 146.

all three of the case studies. Furthermore, the answers to these questions represent deeply held assumptions that are inexorably intertwined with the perception and implementation of a command philosophy. Consequently, the underlying assumptions that tell the commander who to be and how to act form the baseline for establishing a command philosophy. It is also critical to note that in two of the case studies, this network of beliefs conflicted with expectations of combat, yet it still heavily influenced commander behavior.

While the implementation of a command philosophy rests on beliefs about the nature of warfare and commanders, a final set of assumptions is required to understand the implementation of a command philosophy. This network of beliefs is less apparent than the other two in the case studies but its impact is equally profound on behavior. Who subordinates are, what they are capable of, and most importantly what their contribution to victory can and should be are all beliefs that heavily influence implementation of a command philosophy. The cultural beliefs surrounding subordinates are also particularly indicative of command philosophy because they are very different between a centralized and a mission orders framework. The network of beliefs required for a mission orders philosophy is much more complex than the one required to implement a centralized philosophy. Ultimately, subordinates must be capable of executing the commander's orders for a centralized philosophy, a mission orders philosophy expects them to use their own capabilities to increase combat power and contribute to success at their level and throughout the chain of command.

Studying these three networks of cultural assumptions in these historical case studies reveals some underlying assumptions that directly conflict with a mission orders philosophy and others that undermine it indirectly. The framework of underlying assumptions that drive behavior is not stagnant. However, there are identifiable similarities and commonalities that cross the periods of change in this study. Prior to the First World War, assumptions about both the nature of combat and the capabilities and roles within the army made operating under a mission orders philosophy a minority belief that required a fundamentally altered understanding of combat and the chain of command. The interwar period proved crucial to understanding resistance to mission orders philosophy. Initially the experience of the First World War only superficially altered the network of cultural assumptions that drove behavior. The Army put enormous effort into bolstering the cultural assumptions taken into the war in order to reconcile them with the experience. However, by the mid-1930s the expectations of combat were radically altered. The underlying assumptions governing expectations of commanders and subordinates remained unchanged. This discord created a logical gap between the environment the culture expected to operate in and the behavior it expected in this environment. This friction was accepted and expectations for behavior survived insulated from the perceived change to the battlefield. Fundamental and sweeping changes were very much a part of the Army's transition from Vietnam to Desert Storm. However, amongst massive shifts in conceptions of combat and greatly increased capability assessments, incorporation of mission orders remained at a level that required continued emphasis. Furthermore, some held on to the same expectations of commander and

subordinate behavior that demanded centralized action. Again, expectations of commander and subordinate behavior proved insulated from battlefield expectations for at least a portion of the culture. The network of deeply held assumptions was still not fully conducive to a mission orders philosophy and resulted in continued resistance.

CHAPTER 2

COMMAND PHILOSOPHY IN THE PRE-WAR ARMY

To be at the head of a strong column of troops, in the execution of some task that requires brain, is the highest pleasure of war- a grim one and terrible, but which leaves on the mind and memory the strongest mark; to detect the weak point of an enemy's line to break through with vehemence and thus lead to victory; or to discover some key-point and hold it with tenacity; or to do some other distinct act which is afterward recognized as the real cause of success. These all become matters that are never forgotten.¹³

— General of the Army William Tecumseh Sherman

The study of the conceptions of command philosophy in the early 20th century is challenging in the lack of an official doctrine or single authoritative source for espoused values of leadership. As a giant of both U.S. military culture and the drive toward professionalism in the 19th century, General Sherman's comments provide an appreciable starting point for understanding the prerequisite underlying assumptions during the period. They also contain elements of the active cultural assumptions controlling the concept of combat, the cultural expectations of commanders and subordinates, and are suggestive of the resultant command philosophy. Similarly, the inertial power of culture and the special strength of conceptions held at the formulation of culture require a discussion of the network of underlying assumptions that dominated the culture at its inception.¹⁴ The perceived need for professionalization from the late 19th century and into World War I is well documented. However, examination of the concepts

¹³Walter E. Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine From the American Revolution to the War on Terror* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), vi.

¹⁴Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 21-22, 232-233.

and beliefs that were codified and subsequently became drivers of thought and behavior is less prevalent.

Sherman's comment contains elements of both the conceptualization of combat and elements of behavioral expectations of commanders required to produce victory. First, the phrase "in the execution of some task that requires brain," demonstrates the intellectual and professional knowledge mastery expected from a good officer. Second, "to detect the weak point of an enemy's line to break through with vehemence and thus lead to victory; or to discover some key-point and hold it with tenacity" is an espoused value of an underlying cultural assumption. His decisions are the critical action in battlefield success. In concert, these two espoused values reveal a belief that the sufficiently professional officer can impose his will on the battlefield to assure victory. Third, "recognized as the real cause of success" is the logical culmination of the two previous assumptions. His decision secures victory; not the actions undertaken to implement his decision. Sherman has secured victory by identifying and implementing the correct solution to a combat problem. Unstated, but intimately tied to the three cultural assumptions is that Sherman is effectively alone in both effort and success. Insight into the behavioral expectations of subordinates is by exclusion. He is more than ultimately responsible for victory—he is solely responsible. Alone, there is no single premise that opposes a mission orders philosophy. However in sum, these four premises point both to a conception of combat and of the functionality of the Army that will resist a mission orders philosophy. The construct for conveying this message is also indicative of the underlying assumptions. There is not a chain of command; it has been replaced

with a single commander and his subordinates. Execution of the orders is as absent; victory is assured with the correct decision—not in carrying it out.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the network of underlying assumptions driving behavior in the army was a complex set of beliefs that, sometimes indirectly, resisted the implementation of a mission orders philosophy. At the center of this network is a shared belief in the rational nature of the battlefield. Second, the assumptions about the role and responsibility of the commander demanded that he singularly produced victory. His responsibility to produce victory is overwhelmingly associated with making a critical decision. Commanders were empowered by their knowledge to deduce the correct solution for combat. Completing this network of beliefs was an underlying assumption that properly trained subordinates would be perfectly obedient in executing the commander's solution. This complex milieu of leadership amalgamates into a conception of command philosophy that approaches Horatius; determined to stand alone on the bridge defending the Republic with preeminent professional skill.

To return to Schein's conceptualization, basic assumptions dominate the thinking of a culture by shaping how they interpret information and how they explain the functioning of the world.¹⁵ The cultural belief in a rational battlefield is not based in naivety or a simplification of combat, but rather in a belief that with a proper understanding a commander may impose his will on combat. Combat is essentially a science confined to rational rules of operation. To return to Sherman's summary, "to detect the weak point of an enemy's line to break through with vehemence and thus lead

¹⁵Ibid., 31.

to victory; or to discover some key-point and hold it with tenacity.”¹⁶ This implies that there is a right answer in combat, and further a good commander may discover it and secure victory.

A review of capstone doctrine from 1905 through the First World War supports this belief. The “commander’s estimate” is the vehicle for the application of the correct solution. A commander bases his estimate on appropriate and timely information about the battlefield and this empowers him to make the correct decision. This commander centric formulation is only possible on a rational and knowable battlefield. It does not undermine a mission orders philosophy directly. However, it implies that enough information will be available to arrive at the correct estimate and solution. Furthermore, taken to its logical conclusion, that the correct decision will impose the commanders will on the battlefield and secure victory, it doubly undermines the need for a mission orders philosophy by reducing the uncertainty of combat. The 1914 *FSR* expresses this conception of combat at least three times in “Part II Operations.” The most succinct example appears under the heading “Composition of Formal Field Orders” which states, “the leader must make an estimate of the situation, culminating in a decision upon a definite plan of action. He must then actually draft or word the orders which will carry his decision into effect.”¹⁷ Only an underlying assumption of a rational and therefore understandable combat environment allows for a simplistic conceptualization that is in total: understand the situation, choose the correct solution, and order the correct solution.

¹⁶Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, vi.

¹⁷War Department, Office of the Chief of Staff, *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1914* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 45.

Execution of the orders is a moot point; the critical step in this formulation is discovering the correct solution. The enemy's ability to influence friendly forces is conspicuously absent from large swaths of the 1914 *FSR*.

Perhaps the most culturally telling sentence in the *FSR* is, "To be surprised is never justifiable in warfare."¹⁸ It is unacceptable to be surprised in battle because the battlefield can be understood and therefore controlled. The next section of the 1914 *FSR* reinforces this dismissal of surprise, titled "the rencontre." It is best defined as a chance encounter. Despite the inherent uncertainty in such an operation, the *FSR* is definite in its demands: "no action of the enemy should rob [the commander] of the initiative."¹⁹ Furthermore, proper action by the commander of the force in contact will ensure that the senior commander remains, "uninfluenced by the first dispositions of the enemy."²⁰ It is particularly telling of the underlying assumptions of combat that the enemy has no vote in the commander's ability to secure a valid estimate of the situation and impose his will upon the battlefield. Some historians date this methodology to the "applicatory method" of analyzing and solving tactical problems taught in the army's professional education

¹⁸Ibid., 88.

¹⁹Ibid., 89.

²⁰Ibid.

system.²¹ This process, of moving through an enumerated series of steps to arrive at a solution is further evidence of a cultural assumption of the rational nature of combat.²²

The Army's nascent school system reinforced this network of underlying assumptions describing proper execution of combat on a coherent battlefield. Prewar map instruction reinforced the coherent conception of battle. Map instruction came in two forms: as an independent commander with the purpose of demonstrating a specific learned tactical principle, or as a subordinate commander with the learning objective of demonstrating the ability to write a detailed order of execution within the commander's solution.²³ Major John Morrison was perhaps the most famous of the prewar tactics instructors. His students identified themselves as "Morrison men" and called him "the 'master-mind' of the pre-World War I Army."²⁴ They also identified that he focused on "unchanging tactical principals" at the expense of commanding or employing soldiers.²⁵ It is worth noting that General George Marshall described Morrison's problems as, "contain[ing] a knockout if you failed to recognize the principle involved in meeting the

²¹Timothy K. Nenninger, "The Fort Leavenworth Schools: Postgraduate Military Education and Professionalization in the US Army 1880-1920" (Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1974), 127-138. Source provides a detailed discussion of the steps and details of the applicatory method as practiced at the Fort Leavenworth Schools.

²²Tim Nenniger, "The Leavenworth Schools, Professional Military Education, and Reform in the Old Army, 1900-1917," in *The Proceedings of the Combat Studies Institute, 2010 Military History Symposium*, ed. Kendall D. Gott (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 75-76.

²³Timothy K. Nenninger, "The Fort Leavenworth Schools: Postgraduate Military Education and Professionalization in the US Army 1880-1920," 130-1.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 197-8.

²⁵*Ibid.*

situation.”²⁶ The existence of a determinate principle leading to an approved solution is corroborating evidence of the knowable and solvable nature of combat.

Further evidence of the belief in approved solutions on the battlefield are evident in the April 1918 *Cavalry Journal*. A junior officer joined an ongoing mission orders debate by lamenting his educational experience:

I have been red-inked at a school on a solution of a [tactical] problem for a departure from the approved solution. I was not informed that I had violated any principal but that a second lieutenant could not improve a solution of a [tactical problem] therefore a departure was necessarily wrong.²⁷

The author gives no other detail on his interaction with his instructor, but from the tone of his letter, it is fair to assume that his instructor summarily dismissed the answer because it was not the approved solution. The phrase “necessarily wrong” is particularly telling: the purpose of instruction is to ensure the officer recognizes and applies the “correct solution” anything else is failure. The commander’s function is to secure victory by implementing the approved solution. His ability to estimate the situation and order a solution is the critical factor in combat.

The 1914 *FSR* is clear on the perils of an improper estimation of the situation. The chapter on “Offensive Combat” provides insight into the consequences of a poor estimate and a window into the impediments to adopting a mission orders philosophy.

²⁶Ibid. Though beyond the scope of this paper Marshall is also quoted as stating “He [Morrison] taught me all I had ever known of tactics” and provides an interesting bridge to Marshall’s own mentoring of Generals Bradley, Hodges, and Collins and their “zero defect” directive oriented style as advanced by Daniel Bolger.

²⁷One of Them, “Why is it? Another Answer,” *Cavalry Journal* 28 (April 1918): 556. “Tactical problem” was directly substituted for “Grippenkarl problem” a reference to Karl Grippen, a German author of military theory.

In the absence of orders, subordinate commanders are not justified in pushing to the assault, no matter how promising conditions in their front may be, if there are not reserves available in their part of the field to insure success, or if success would interfere with the general plan . . . [as a]ssaults by small bodies of troops can succeed only where conditions of terrain are such as to afford them cover and protect their flanks. Otherwise, if they are not supported by other parts of the line, the result may be the annihilation of the assaulting force.

At the surface, it is clear that the consequence for misconstruing the situation may be catastrophic. However, it is important to note that the poor decision maker is a “subordinate commander.” The intended audience of the *FSR*, who is senior and expected to make the appropriate decision in combat, is therefore cautioned, “Rather than support a premature minor assault, it is best to let such assault expend itself, even to annihilation.”²⁸ While this discussion is realistic; and the construct is certainly tactically appropriate, in some circumstances, its inclusion and frank discussion could easily be construed as stifling subordinate initiative. The strength of this espoused value is particularly telling. At a minimum, subordinate commanders will pause when determining an assault is the best “how” to achieve the “what” a senior commander has assigned them. Similarly, a senior commander would be wise to keep a firm hold on subordinates to prevent them from expending themselves. Moreover, because the commander’s ability to deduce the right solution is the decisive point in battle: it is the apex of both the cultural expectations of combat and the expectations of commander behavior. Victory rests on the commander’s ability to estimate the situation and provide the decision that assures victory.

²⁸War Department, *Field Service Regulations 1914*, 94-95.

The professional journals of the period furthered discussions of a rational battlefield and provided additional direct evidence of the detriment these underlying assumptions had on implementing a mission orders philosophy. An anonymous colonel recounts a discussion with several subordinates in the *Cavalry Journal* as follows:

I asked them: ‘why is it that you don’t go ahead when you want to do something, without asking if it’s alright to do it?’ One of the officers, a lieutenant, and an officer generally recognized throughout the service as an expert on the mechanical employment of machine guns, replied: ‘Why Colonel, all my service I’ve been jumped on so Hard if anything that I attempted to do without authority went wrong, that I have learned the safest way is to do only what I knew beforehand will be approved.’ And the other chimed in: ‘same here!’²⁹

The lieutenant’s comments follow the logic of the 1914 *FSR*, but from the perspective of an unfortunate subordinate. He has learned that any deviation from his orders draws the ire of the commander. Like the lieutenant of the schoolhouse, he cannot improve upon an approved solution and is “necessarily wrong.” The rational battlefield construct requires only one commander who can solve the problem the battlefield presents. This lieutenant is incapable of adding to his commander’s solution, his most valuable contribution is executing the explicit orders of the commander. Moreover, any deviation will be viewed as detrimental to the commander’s solution. A summary of the network of cultural assumptions on combat paint a picture of a commander singularly burdened with gathering the proper information to determine the correct solution to secure victory. Sherman’s description of the officer ideal as “ultimately responsible” seems unambiguously appropriate. A more robust expression of the espoused value would be solely responsible for the decision that produces victory.

²⁹“Why is it?” *Cavalry Journal* 28 (October 1917): 271.

However, this is not to say that an extraordinary intellect is required. Secretary Elihu Root, often credited with fostering professionalism and the birth of the professional education system in the army, directed that “Especial attention will be paid to the records made by individuals at each step of this progressive course, in order that those most deserving shall be given further opportunity for perfecting themselves in the profession of arms.”³⁰ Officers may obtain perfection through schooling, and therefore perfection is attainable with effort. The U.S. Military Academy provides a separate perspective of the same assumption. In *Bugle Notes*, new cadets are enjoined that, “Genius wins sometimes; hard work always.”³¹

West Point provides further indirect evidence of both the rational nature of combat and the responsibility of the commander to determine the correct solution in the 1908 rebuttal of the Commander in Chief by the Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy. President Roosevelt wrote a critical letter to the Secretary of War about the heavily scientific curriculum of the military academy. He also notes in his letter that it is not the first time he has directed change to no result.³² Superintendent, Colonel Scott is unflinching in his response to the President:

It is believed that mathematical training at the Military Academy has been the main factor in all the accomplishments of graduates; that it, more than any other

³⁰Nenniger, “The Leavenworth Schools, Professional Military Education, and Reform in the Old Army, 1900-1917,” 80.

³¹*Bugle Notes Volume XI* (West Point, NY: U.S. Military Academy Printing Office, 1919), 97.

³²Patricia B. Genung, “Teaching Foreign Languages at West Point,” in *West Point Two Centuries and Beyond*, ed. Lance Betros (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2004), 517.

factor, has generated the power of the graduate for profound logical thinking; it has been the means for the installation of proper self-confidence, for undertaking unhesitatingly the unfamiliar, and for going unerringly and indomitably after results whenever demanded by duty of any nature.³³

Mathematics is the best preparation for combat leaders because it teaches future leaders to solve the logical problems of combat. Like math, deduction and reasoning will provide a correct answer in battle. It seems unthinkable to be so dismissive of the Commander in Chief in a military matter. However, Schein provides a means of reconciling the incongruous behavior, “if a basic assumption comes to be strongly held in a group, members will find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable.”³⁴ Consequently, if the Commander in Chief’s instructions violate a deeply held cultural assumption, then they are justifiably resisted as foolhardy.

To summarize the exposed cultural assumptions to this point: combat is a logical endeavor that contains an appropriate and discoverable solution in every circumstance, and the commander of a given formation is responsible for discerning the correct solution and imposing it upon a relatively helpless enemy. The commander is the lynchpin of battlefield success because he makes the decision that secures victory. Expanding the examination of underlying cultural assumptions to include those surrounding the role of the commander further assists in understanding the resistance to a mission orders philosophy during the period. First, the culture charged commanders with knowing the correct solution to tactical problems; this made their knowledge the foundation of their authority. Second, the previously discussed assumptions that this knowledge was

³³Ibid., 518.

³⁴Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 31.

obtainable through hard work created a uniquely heightened absolute responsibility to the position of commander. While a cultural belief that commanders are ultimately responsible to secure victory does not suggest a command philosophy, by holding commanders solely responsible for making the decision that secures victory lends itself to a centralized construct. A commander must have the answer to fulfill his role.

Throughout the first half of the century, the most frequent espoused value in connection with leadership is that of the teacher or drillmaster, it is clear that knowledge is the leader's source of power. In his article entitled, "Training National Guard Cavalry" Captain George Grunert concisely espouses this conception of leadership in multiple sections. Tracing this concept through his article and comparing it to contemporary concepts in other sources illustrates the underlying assumption that from knowledge, comes authority. First Grunert explains his methods for instructing lieutenants on drill: "From the beginning know what is right before your order it, and know it so well that you will note the mistakes of everyman in your squad, and after noting them do not lose an instant in making the necessary corrections. This is the secret of successful drill instruction."³⁵ Leaders are leaders because they know the right answer. The *Provisional Infantry Training Manual* goes further describing effective officers as those who "maintain the highest degree of attention and instruction energy. They cause their N.C.O's to constantly feel pressure for maximum efficiency in instruction work and the securing of results. They frequently assemble their N.C.O.'s for very short and sharp

³⁵George Grunert, "Training National Guard Cavalry," *Cavalry Journal* 28 (July 1917): 9.

conferences.”³⁶ It follows that knowledge enables demanding leadership and that achieves “maximum efficiency.” Returning to Grunert, he describes resistance from the colonel, not because he disagrees with Grunert’s precepts, but because he is uncomfortable sharing his font of authority:

With reference to the talks to the majors I had quite a time convincing the colonel that his field officers were to be used for the purpose of instruction and not as figure heads. The colonel was certain that my system would disrupt his regiment and that I was taking command from him and was giving each major a third of it and thereby legislating him out of a job.³⁷

James Moss’ *Officers’ Manual* also champions knowledge and intellect as the source of increased authority. He describes a captain as the commander of a company because he is, “a man of greater experience, education, and information.”³⁸ Major C. A. Bach goes even further, in his summary of cultural leadership assumptions by stating that the most important quality of leadership was self-confidence. More interesting was his explanation, “self-confidence results, first, from exact knowledge; second, the ability to impart that knowledge; and, third, the feeling of superiority over others that naturally follows.”³⁹

Bach’s superiority is suggestive of an unintended consequence of the intimate association of knowing and leading. The downside of this assumption of leadership

³⁶War Department, War Plans Division, *Provisional Infantry Training Manual 1918* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 40.

³⁷Grunert, “Training National Guard Cavalry,” 15.

³⁸James A. Moss, *Officers’ Manual*, 6th ed. (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Company, 1917), 185.

³⁹C. A. Bach, “Leadership,” *Infantry Journal* 14, no. 8 (February 1918): 607.

through knowledge is a rapid slide into leadership through intelligence and intellectual ability. With this shift, accommodating mission orders rapidly moves from difficult to impossible. Moss' indirect condemnation of mission orders is so potent it warrants recounting. Moss spends two pages extolling the virtue and rarity of Rowan in delivering *A Message to Garcia* and counseling his readers that they must emulate Rowan. He then states, "No man, who has endeavored to carry out an enterprise where many hands were needed, but has been well-nigh appalled at times by the imbecility of the average man--the inability or unwillingness to concentrate on a thing and do it."⁴⁰ The following two pages are an imagined conversation with a 'typical' subordinate who is as lazy as he is incompetent. Moss spends equal time telling his aspiring, or junior, officer to be like Rowan and the other half cautioning him that his subordinates will certainly not be capable of carrying a message to Garcia. This bent toward patronizing paternalism is not isolated. It also serves to isolate leadership and responsibility at one level. Similar to the subordinate leader in the 1914 *FSR* who makes a poor estimate of the situation in assaulting, subordinates can be expected to fail but responsibility remains firmly on the shoulders of the commander responsible for the decision.

Interplay with other underlying assumptions further intensifies the unique responsibility of the commander in this network of underlying assumptions. It begins with the rational understanding of the battlefield, and continues into the expectation of commanders to find the correct solution on the battlefield. Because there are no surprises in combat for the capable officer, and an officer may perfect himself through hard work,

⁴⁰Moss, *Officers' Manual*, 69.

incompetence and indolence are at the root of unsuccessful action. Typical of this sentiment is Moss' instruction to "[r]emember 'Stonewall' Jackson's motto: 'A man can do anything he makes up his mind to do.'"⁴¹ On one level, an officer must perfect himself because there are no excuses for failure. However, on another level an officer is expected to bring victory because he can secure it through knowledge and will alone. Cultural expectations of commander's responsibility extend further than the actions of the commander. Bach's treatise on leadership gives an initial impression of this expanded responsibility. He sternly warns:

Be an example to your men. An officer can be a power for good or a power for evil. . . . A loud-mouthed profane captain who is careless of his personal appearance will have a loud-mouthed, profane, dirty company. Remember what I tell you. Your company will be the reflection of yourself. If you have a rotten company it will be because you are a rotten captain.⁴²

This sentiment seems benign in its impact on command philosophy. However, much like intellect as the font of authority, the commander as a role model was often expanded to something more indicative of command philosophy.

Commander of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), General John J. Pershing's principles for training the AEF prior to combat in France are taken the role model sentiment further:

All officers and soldiers should realize that at no time in our history had discipline been so important; therefore discipline of the highest order must be exacted at all times. The standards of the American Army will be those of West Point. The rigid attention, upright bearing, attention to detail, uncomplaining obedience to instructions required of every officer and soldier of our Armies in France. Failure to attain such discipline will be treated as a lack of capacity on the part of the

⁴¹Ibid., 189.

⁴²Bach, "Leadership," 608.

commander to create in the subordinate that intensity of purpose and willing acceptance of hardship which are necessary to success in battle.⁴³

Here the unique responsibility of the commander is further isolated. If the commander correctly determines the solution in combat the only remaining point of failure is in execution. Pershing's statement isolates responsibility for a failure in execution to the commander. If subordinates fail to execute the commanders approved solution, it is because the commander failed to prepare them for the hardship of combat. In these two examples, it is clear that the commander's responsibility is expansive; in addition to identifying the necessary actions in combat he is responsible for their success in execution. The second order effect of this construct is a minimization of the expectations of subordinates. Because execution is a foregone conclusion, and the enemy's ability to influence the outcome has been minimized all responsibility is on the commander. In a parallel to Sherman's quote the subordinate makes no positive contribution, and like the *FSR* caution on subordinates "pushing to assault", subordinates may detract from success if not closely controlled by commander. As the final influencing network of beliefs expectations of subordinates warrant closer examination. Pershing alluded to assumptions of rigid obedience in his comments on meeting the looming challenge of the First World War. However, there were a plethora of other writings that limit expectations of subordinates to absolute obedience.

A review of cultural artifacts from the prewar period produces an understanding of the interchangeable definitions of discipline and obedience during the period as well as

⁴³Richard S. Faulkner, *School of Hard Knocks* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 144.

an appreciation of the strength of the assumption of obedience. Obedience is clearly the foundation of success on the modern battlefield. *Leadership and Military Training* by Lieutenant Colonel Lincoln Clarke Andrews, written in 1918, was intended to prepare civilians for service in the World War. Andrews summarized that discipline was, “as vital to the success of an army, as live steam to the operation of a locomotive.”⁴⁴ He distilled the military system as follows:

Considering the organization of an army itself, its object is, that all these men and animals may be . . . fought in battle, every ounce of this energy instantly controlled and directed by the will of the chief . . . and the whole machine is moving uniformly, accurately responsive to the master mind. The guiding principles of this military machine are teamwork and subordination. Its animating soul is discipline.⁴⁵

Andrews sharpest warnings for the aspiring leader are overlooking “slight deviations and omissions” in the execution of orders, as it will lead to eventual willful disobedience.⁴⁶ He goes further in explaining the distance between an officer and his men is essential to, “preclude the possibility of questioning an order from a superior.”⁴⁷

The *Provisional Infantry Manual* of 1918 instructs that to instill discipline a leader should, “make routine use of close order ‘steadiness drill,’” and ensure, “the

⁴⁴Lincoln Clark Andrews, *Leadership and Military Training* (Philadelphia, PA: J. P. Lippencott Company, 1918), 21.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁶Andrews goes so far as to compare men to horses in stubbornness and suggests that forcing a subordinate in a conditioned response, such as correcting their uniform, will lessen resistance on larger obedience issues. Control can thus be reestablished and when the man or horse is returned to the first issue, “you will find him tractable.” Andrews, *Leadership*, 45.

⁴⁷Andrews, *Leadership*, 52.

men . . . understand the meaning of discipline. Use occasions of hardship to strengthen ideas of discipline in the minds of the men.”⁴⁸ *Training Circular No. 5* merits quoting at length, as it clarifies the purpose of drill, the definition of the discipline expected, and provides a window into the assumption driving these espoused values:

Discipline—Modern war as now carried on in Europe requires of infantry the greatest discipline obtainable. The failure of men to carry out their orders implicitly in an attack means unnecessary heavy losses, if not absolute failure. It is found that only thoroughly disciplined troops can carry out a modern attack where every step must be taken in accordance with a careful schedule. The first great step then in fitting infantry troops for service abroad is to inculcate the spirit of discipline. . . . The precise movements of the manual of arms and close-order drill are not for the purpose of teaching men how to get about on the battlefield. They will hardly be used there at all. One of the principal objects is to train the soldiers’ minds and bodies to habits of precise unhesitating obedience to the will of the leader, so that in the stress of battle they will obey without conscious effort, mechanically, automatically, as the most natural line of action.⁴⁹

It is significant that close order drill has lost its tactical utility but has been retained despite substantial time and effort costs for its byproduct. Clearly, there is a cultural assumption that reflexive obedience is a requisite of securing victory. Instilling this unthinking, unhesitating obedience is the first step in making soldiers mission capable. If soldiers are not obedient, they are a potentially lethal hindrance. Examining the instructions to leaders allows us to fully appreciate the virulence with which this assumption is held. In reference to close order drill, “When men fail through persistent

⁴⁸War Department, *Provisional Infantry Training Manual 1918*, 42-43.

⁴⁹War Department, Adjutant General’s Office, *Training Circular No. 5, Infantry Training* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 12-13.

carelessness, inattention or willfulness, then use as drastic measures as necessary [to bring them to obedience].”⁵⁰

Pursuing an alternate line of exploration on Pershing’s espoused beliefs on training provides another view of obedience as a baseline cultural assumption required for victory. Pershing calls for the standards and discipline of West Point as the foundation of the AEF. Perhaps, West Point is a definable sub-culture in itself. However, as the commissioning source of 74 percent of the general officer’s in World War I, it merits exploration.⁵¹ Furthermore, Pershing’s identification of the artifacts of West Point as the means of ensuring battlefield success warrant a cultural examination as it relates to the study of command philosophy.

The Superintendent’s report of 1918 to the Adjutant General of the Army contains a large section written in response to a “hazing” incident in 1917 that resulted in the courts-martial of seven cadets. General Samuel Tillman explains that it is particularly difficult to eliminate “hazing” without doing damage to “certain elements of discipline and training which are of unquestioned importance.”⁵² With this assertion, the stage is set for a sympathetic explanation of why and how hazing occurs and why officers have sanctioned it in the past. In the Superintendent’s own words:

⁵⁰Ibid., 12.

⁵¹Jorg Muth, *Command Culture Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901-1940 and the Consequences for World War II* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2011), 44.

⁵²United States Military Academy, *Annual Report of the Superintendent* (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy Press, 1918), 4-5.

1st. the fact that many practices have been countenanced, though not openly authorized, shows that the controlling authorities recognized advantage in them: one main advantage consisted in the quicker attainment by the new man of the mental attitude and physical bearing of a West Point cadet. If instruction were given to and obedience compelled only while in ranks, or on duty, the plebes would be a far longer time in reaching a fitness for association in the ranks of the upper classmen. That fundamental principle of discipline, "willing obedience," is far sooner acquired by practicing it out of ranks as well as in, both on duty and off.⁵³

It is best to err on the side of obedience with hazing, rather than risk ill discipline without.

Furthermore, in stating that willing obedience is a requirement of fitness for association with the upperclassmen it is clear that a cadet has no value to the Corps before he learns proper discipline. As the explanation continues, so does the evidence presented that obedience is the measure of utility for a subordinate and therefore justified.

[2nd] . . . [hazing] was only an effort to bring about quick military fitness in these men. It has been the case, almost without exception, since the Civil War, that the cadets who have received the greatest and the closest attention, both authorized and unauthorized from the older cadets, have been the young men who were slow to acquire, or at least to display the proper military spirit and bearing.

The justification of the critical nature of instilling discipline continues for another four pages, to include five practical reasons elimination of hazing is difficult and despite leaders' efforts occurred in the preceding six decades. Despite the Superintendent's admission that: "There is and has always been motives involved here that have no counterpart elsewhere," hazing was a popular practice at nearly every pre-commissioning military school during the period.⁵⁴ The strength of the underlying assumption is clear,

⁵³Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁴Ibid., 8. References to hazing or the respective corps of cadets rebelling due to loss of power over subordinate classes can be found in Rod Andrew Jr., *Long Grey Lines, the Southern Military School Tradition, 1839-1915* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 45, 71-72, 77.

and the espoused value of proper conduct amongst the cadets has been powerless to change it. Hazing is a distasteful by-product of the essential prerequisite of battlefield success, instilling willing obedience. To be of use, a soldier, or cadet and therefore, by extension, an officer must first learn the mechanical obedience that is a prerequisite of victory in the early 20th century. Unhesitating obedience is the highest form of utility in a subordinate. In short, leadership was nearly synonymous with discipline because the leader ordered and the subordinate obeyed. This conception was the baseline that the U.S. Army brought to the First World War.⁵⁵

This network of underlying assumptions places a minimal value on the subordinates outside of the expectations of obedience. This devaluation is supported by the 1914 *FSR*:

Personal conferences between the higher commanders and the subordinates who are to execute their orders may at times be advisable, in order that the latter may arrive at a correct understanding of the plans and intentions of their superiors and may correctly interpret the orders issued. But such conferences are not for the purpose of criticizing the orders or plans of the higher commander, nor to influence the latter's action. The officer issuing the order can not share the responsibility therefor with any of his subordinates. The decision, no matter how arrived at, is his alone.⁵⁶

The *FSR* both reinforced the sole responsibility of the commander, and an undervaluation of subordinates. Clearly, a subordinate's contribution to victory is only in the correct execution of orders. There is more than an implication that a subordinate is either unthinking in obedience or a hindrance. In a review of contemporary sources, there is an undercurrent of distrust reinforcing this worldview. This lack of trust helps to explain

⁵⁵Faulkner, *School of Hard Knocks*, 103.

⁵⁶War Department, *Field Service Regulations 1914*, 84.

why a subordinate's value exists only in proper execution of orders. The doctrine and professional journals of the period provide clear evidence of an underlying assumption of enormous risk in empowering subordinates.

Amongst the instructions for “development and deployment for action” in the 1914 *FSR*, are instructions to micromanage subordinates who fail to address basic expectations of competent leadership, provided a replacement cannot be found.⁵⁷ Within this paragraph we see that Moss' cautionary tale that subordinates will not be able to carry a “message to Garcia” is not an isolated sentiment. In fact, in nearly all arguments for or about a mission orders philosophy, during this period, caution that subordinates may not be capable enough, or acknowledge that it may be a better system but it is not workable in current circumstances. This is certainly the case in the *FSR*, the instructions for micromanagement of untrustworthy subordinates immediately precedes the often-quoted paragraph 149, which calls a lack of initiative on the part of a subordinate commander who knows the general plan, inexcusable.⁵⁸

Perhaps the most devastating example of trust undermining a mission orders philosophy comes from a direct discussion in the 1917 *Cavalry Journal*. An unnamed colonel wrote to the editor under the title “Why is it?” In the opening paragraphs, the author describes his experiences in a chain of command that functioned efficiently along mission orders lines. He describes the commanding officer as standing above all others he has served. Seeing the value of ascribing to a mission orders philosophy firsthand, the

⁵⁷Ibid., 35.

⁵⁸Ibid.

author asserts: “I have adopted this as my guide: *loyalty alone induces loyalty: initiative is developed by confidence, and successful leadership depends on initiative, confidence and loyalty.*”⁵⁹ However, reflecting on the article in its entirety, it serves as a powerful justification for why a mission orders philosophy is infeasible. The expanded question of the author is why is it the lieutenants are untrained to leadership, and without initiative?⁶⁰ He draws on his experience as the arbiter of field testing for companies and points out that these are professional officers of seven to nine years’ experience who were “good officers, as we reckon in our army, all of them; There was not a drone or dullard among them.”⁶¹ However, his assessment of their performance is damning:

They do not know how to fight.

At the conclusion of the examination I said to a group of them: “Gentlemen you impress me as being like a dentist who knows how to rent his office, employ a secretary, purchase his supplies, keep his office in a sanitary condition—but who cannot fill teeth.

He concludes that the answer to his original question (why is it?) is: “Too many of our commanding officers, in the past, have not had confidence in their subordinates, and let them know it; as a result loyalty waivered, and initiative died.”⁶² The anonymous colonel is clearly espousing a minority belief, as indicated by his desire to remain unnamed, but he is concerned enough about the poor performance of the long service lieutenants to attempt to draw cultural attention to it.

⁵⁹“Why is it?”, 269.

⁶⁰Ibid., 272.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 269.

Another anonymous author responds in the January issue of the *Cavalry Journal*. In his article, “Why is it? An answer” he provides further evidence that the cultural assumptions on leadership that are in practice undermine a mission orders philosophy. While the 1914 *FSR* advocates a five-paragraph field order, the author makes it clear that it is not the custom in the army. His complaints are worth examining at length:

Taking the usual form of the field order as an example; paragraph 1 gives the information of our own and the hostile forces; paragraph 2, the commanders intentions or object sought; paragraph 3, the detailed instructions to commanders and units in order to carry out the intent of paragraph 2. In general matters of our service, paragraph 3 is the only one given out. Our every act is prescribed with the greatest particularity of detail and is given such prominence that the object in view is frequently not even guessed.⁶³

This explanation not only provides insight into the execution of the field order from the 1914 *FSR* but also reframes the admonition in paragraph 149 of subordinate commanders who fail to take initiative when they know the general plan. Subordinates who are not trusted with the commander’s intent compound the cycle preventing adoption of a mission orders philosophy, because they never get the opportunity to gain trust by taking appropriate initiative.

As the cultural assumptions used by the pre-World War I army come into focus it is clear that the adoption of a mission orders philosophy faced an uphill battle. The network of cultural assumptions that drove behavior was both logical and coherent. However, it was not compatible with a mission orders philosophy. Combat, though chaotic, was rational and therefore understandable by a dedicated professional commander. A commander was empowered by his knowledge because he could ensure

⁶³“Why is it? An Answer,” *Cavalry Journal* 28 (January 1918): 422.

success by issuing the correct orders. The Army functioned by ensuring subordinates were conditioned for willing obedience. This milieu directly parallels the proposed advantages of a centralized command philosophy and in doing so devaluates the advantages of a mission orders philosophy. First, the use of the commander as the lynchpin of success nearly mirrors the proposed advantages of a centralized command philosophy. Furthermore, in every instance ‘the commander’ is referenced as the *sine qua non* of battlefield success it is by making the critical decision in an isolated and generally unsupported role. An undercurrent of skepticism for the abilities of subordinate leaders compounded this expectation of behavior. In total the network of cultural assumptions in the prewar period resisted a mission orders philosophy because the commander of any action was believed to be best able to determine both the what, and the how, of combat execution. In short, the network of underlying assumptions that influenced behavior could be summarized as the more directive the commander and obedient the subordinates the better the chances of battlefield success.

CHAPTER 3

COMMAND PHILOSOPHY IN THE INTER-WAR ARMY

The second period of significant cultural change where underlying cultural assumptions came under scrutiny is the interwar period. Without question, the First World War induced every military involved to change. A great deal of historical research has examined the physical and intellectual changes thoroughly. However, to understand the impact of the Great War on the cultural assumptions that produce a command philosophy it is important to examine the changes through the lens of culture. What happened in the war is much less important than the culture's interpretation of what occurred. The most pertinent aspect of that change is the perceived changes effect on the network of underlying assumptions that guide the army to battlefield success. There were two distinct phases during the interwar period. Initially, experiences were shoehorned into the prewar underlying assumptions. This process resulted in a large expenditure of resources to better arm the commander to perform in the expected manner. Significant but superficial changes resulted in an expanded but fundamentally unaltered network of beliefs governing command philosophy. In short, the culture accepted that the commander needed additional support to function but expected him to perform in the same manner as before the war. A generation of officers passed before the experiences were assimilated into modified cultural assumptions about combat. Possibly this was because the subsequent generation had a different perspective of the combat. However, by the mid-1930s major changes in the underlying assumptions about combat were apparent. By 1939, the doctrinal conception of combat changed significantly; most

notably with the loss of a deterministic understanding of battle. This change broke the logical bridge that demanded a pragmatic and ultimately responsible commander. However, the assumptions about commanders, recently bolstered with an improved educational and staff system, were retained in their entirety. Commanders remained solely responsible for the answer that secured victory even after the culture acknowledged there was no right answer. Cognitive dissidence between the understanding of combat and the expectations of commanders was an accepted part of the network of beliefs that drove behavior at the close of the interwar period.

A brief discussion of the external constraints acting on the Army is necessary to put the change it enacted in perspective. The National Defense Act of 1920 was the dominant legislation of the interwar period.⁶⁴ At its core was the premise that a small professional force would form the center of a “complete and immediate[ly]” mobilized citizen army.⁶⁵ Generally the period can be described as a period of decreasing budgets and as Chief of Staff General Douglas MacArthur put it, requesting “only the amounts on

⁶⁴The first attempt to improve after World War I was the failed Baker-March bill. The bill was named for its sponsors, General Peyton March, the American Expeditionary Force Chief of Staff, and Secretary of War Newton Baker. The bill emphasized strengthening the general staff, improving army education, solidifying the organizational changes made during the war, a 500,000 strong standing army, and a reserve force strengthened by universal training. The bill was widely criticized and its failure was “virtually inevitable” in the political milieu of postwar America. It is excluded from this case study because the elements of Baker-March that were intended to shape culture, specifically the education and training of officers, survived in the 1920 National Defense Act. For more detail see: David E. Johnson, “From Frontier Constabulary to Modern Army: The U.S. Army Between the World Wars,” in *The Challenge of Change*, ed. Harold Winton and David Mets (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 167-69.

⁶⁵John W. Killigrew, “The Impact of the Great Depression on The Army, 1929-1936” (Diss., Indiana University, 1960), iv,1.

which the military establishment can be temporarily maintained, rather than meeting the continuing annual requirements of national defense.”⁶⁶ Hindsight provided by Secretary of War Harry Woodring in 1940 provides a powerful perspective of restrictions placed on the Army:

In other words, of the total of somewhat over six billions appropriated for the military activities of the War Department over a period of 16 years only \$344,656,000—a bare 5.6%—were available for the augmentation, modernization and replacement of arms and equipment for the ground elements of the Army of the United States. In view of these facts it is rather remarkable to me that we have any mobile ground army at all.⁶⁷

Another factor that limited the Army’s ability to change was the peacetime responsibilities Congress assigned. Upon completion of the war, the Army returned to the scattered small garrisons of peacetime and the War Department continued its responsibilities ranging from running the Inland Waterways Corporation to administering the Panama Canal, Philippines, and Puerto Rico.

It would be misleading to construe these massive constraints as preventing the implementation of change during the period. Despite these massive constraints, the impact on desired cultural change was minimal. The army changed significantly, and conducted thorough after action reviews, but its experience and reflection did not lead to a fundamental change in the underlying assumptions of the interwar period. It is difficult to grasp the magnitude of the U.S. Army’s expansion for the World War. Officer strength

⁶⁶Ibid., 103.

⁶⁷Ibid., 432.

increased from 5,960 in April of 1917 to 203,786 in November 1918.⁶⁸ If post war service in Russia is included, the army grew from 127, 588 men in April 1917 to 4,057,101 during the conflict and its immediate aftermath.⁶⁹ The growth factor in both instances is over 30, and the majority moved across the ocean and engaged in a terrible modern war. The success and decisions made by the Army in the interwar period are still a source of debate. However, there is little argument that the Army examined its performance with the intent of improving almost immediately. By March 1919, a seventy-page comprehensive draft plan for improving the Army was already circulating the War Department.⁷⁰ The most prominent after action review was the Superior Board convened by Pershing in April 1919. The Superior Board reflected on “a frustrating year of organization, mobilization, and deployment followed by a brief period of spectacularly successful offensive operations” and its findings were in a similar vein.⁷¹ In summary, the results of a number of introspective examinations were identified deficiencies in the mobilization of a mass army, the supply of such a large army, and the readiness of such a rapidly expanded force.⁷² The culture did not identify major issues with combat

⁶⁸Peter J. Schifferle, “So Rigorously Trained and Educated: Leader Development in the US Army, 1919 to 1939,” in *The Proceedings of the Combat Studies Institute, 2010 Military History Symposium*, ed. Kendall D. Gott (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 92.

⁶⁹Johnson, “From Frontier Constabulary to Modern Army,” 164, 168.

⁷⁰Schifferle, “So Rigorously Trained and Educated,” 95.

⁷¹Johnson, “From Frontier Constabulary to Modern Army,” 167.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 166, 172.

performance and issues with leadership were generally confined to the rapidly commissioned officers required by expansion.

A victorious army saw no need to question its fundamental assumptions though it did improve upon them. The 1923 *FSR* is not a significant departure from the constructs of the 1914 *FSR*. However, those constructs became much more complicated.

Commanders still perceived or gathered information, arrived at an appropriate decision, and imposed their will on the battlefield. In short, the 1923 *FSR* “envisioned combat as a series of orchestrated events.”⁷³ AEF General Headquarters assembled over 20 panels to consolidate lessons learned and disparate doctrinal publications from the war.⁷⁴ The 1923 *FSR* accomplished these goals. It was a more detailed and better illustration of the complexities of war than its 1914 predecessor. Reading both *FSR* in total provides a better understanding of the contemporary impetus to create an educated staff to assist the commander. The battlefield had grown more complex, but it had not changed in a manner that challenged cultural assumptions. General March, AEF Chief of Staff, said it best after the Superior Board adjourned, “The war has taught many lessons; the principles of warfare, however, remain unchanged.”⁷⁵ While this statement is, literally, supported by the *FSR*, it would be fair to substitute Schein’s “cultural assumptions” for March’s “principles of warfare.”

⁷³Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, 137.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁵Johnson, “From Frontier Constabulary to Modern Army,” 168.

The 1923 *FSR* clearly contained more instances of espoused values that support a mission orders philosophy than its predecessors. However, closer examination the underlying assumptions that would secure victory reveals very little change. The variables required in the equation for correct decision-making by the commander were more complex, possibly requiring, “instructions . . . elaborated into a systematic plan of intelligence research.”⁷⁶ However, that there was a correct answer based on attainable knowledge and the commander’s responsibility and solitude in arriving at the correct decision were unchanged. Within the *FSR*, there was still a pattern of preceding or following sections that supported mission orders with a section that demanded centralized control. This pattern mirrored the 1914 *FSR* and largely mitigated the espoused value of mission orders. Paragraph 149 and its admonition of subordinates who fail to take initiative was copied directly from the 1914 *FSR* However, so was the preceding paragraph that paints the commander as alone, even when in conference with his subordinates. A subordinate should have no input into the order, because even with a “correct understanding of the plans and intentions” they will not be able to improve upon a senior leader’s solution.

To summarize, the culture of the early interwar period was dominated by reconciling perpetually shrinking budgets and a sense that combat had gone well in the First World War but preparation and training were deficient.⁷⁷ Because of resource scarcity, priorities for change were particularly telling of the influence of deeply held

⁷⁶War Department, Office of the Chief of Staff, *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1923* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1924), 25.

⁷⁷Johnson, “From Frontier Constabulary to Modern Army,” 167.

cultural assumptions. For example, during roughly the same period in the 1920s and early 1930s the infantry declined by 63 percent but 30 million dollars were spent constructing schools or school related facilities.⁷⁸ Even more telling, pay accounted for 40 percent of annual expenditure during the interwar period and the Army consolidated nearly half of its officers in the schoolhouse throughout the interwar period.⁷⁹ The priority of effort given the schooling system was a clear decision on how to meet the perceived challenges of the First World War. These conditions set the stage for the two major changes in the early interwar period: the need for a specially trained staff and the improvement of the school system to produce them. A trained and professional staff clearly became an artifact of the additional complexity in the understanding of combat. However, like the 1923 *FSR* the change was a superficial expansion of the same bedrock of underlying cultural assumptions.

The applicatory method and approved solutions remained relatively unchanged from prewar instruction. The Command and General Staff School:

[C]hoose[s] to teach singular applications of the model rather than develop a flexible systems approach. The discipline of the approved solution, in most students, exorcised any tendency towards innovation . . . it became almost second nature for graduates to insert standard Leavenworth answers into any problem

⁷⁸The infantry decline is in Romana Danysh and John K. Mahon, *Infantry, Part I: Regular Army* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), 49. More detailed school expenditures can be found in Nenniger, “The Leavenworth Schools, Professional Military Education, and Reform in the Old Army, 1900-1917,” 92.

⁷⁹Schifferle, “So Rigorously Trained and Educated,” 92.

which they encountered regardless of how realistic such an application might be.⁸⁰

In short the education system provided, “rigorous intellectual training which had convinced them [students] of the correctness of the system of approved solutions.”⁸¹ This trend is further evidenced in the professional journals, where bitter complaints about the intellectual confines of the school system were aired. The *Infantry Journal* discussion starting in May 1936 is typical of this sentiment. “Mercutio” advocated elevating only the bottom ten percent of classes to command because the bottom contained all the original thinkers. Anyone in the remaining 90 percent was a “slide-rule tactician, a mechanical brain-master, a canned commander.”⁸²

There was a “general disregard for teaching leadership or command [in] the officer education system.”⁸³ Brigadier General Hanson Ely, Commandant of the General Staff School in 1922, provides an interwar viewpoint on this modern critique: “all commanders to be fully efficient must have detailed knowledge of staff work and that all staff officers to be fully efficient must have intimate knowledge of the commander’s viewpoint.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰Phillip C. Cockrell, *Brown Shoes and Mortar Boards: U.S. Army Officer Professional Education at the command and General Staff School Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1919-1940* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1991), 362.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²Schifferle, “So Rigorously Trained and Educated,” 97.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 97.

The training of staff officers and commander were the same, because despite the massive changes to the support a commander requires, there has not been a change to the underlying assumptions of command behavior. Ely's assessment was that the staff served as an extension of the commander's responsibility to discover the correct solution and order it into action. Consequently, the staff was less a collection individuals working with the commander toward arriving at a solution, than a new required appendage of modern war. A single trained intellect was still the driving force animating the whole of the formation. The staff helped gather data and assists in execution of the commander's decision but they do not otherwise affect the decision. The commander remains Horiatis.

The 1923 *FSR* also upholds the prewar network of cultural assumptions surrounding the commander. The commander remains the focal point of victory. It also reinforced the staff school's conception of the relationship between a commander and his staff. "Whether the command be large or small, and weather the exercise of the function of command be complex or simple, the commander must be the controlling head, his must be the master mind, and from him must flow the energy and impulse which are to animate all under him." Subsequently:

Decision as to the course of action to be pursued in any given case is the responsibility of the commander and presupposes on his part an analysis of all the facts and factors having a bearing on the particular problem under consideration. It is the task of the staff to furnish the commander with such information, data, and advice as he may require in reaching his decision. . . . In general, it is the function of the staff to elaborate the details necessary to carry the decision into effect.⁸⁵

⁸⁵War Department, *Field Service Regulations 1923*, 4.

It is important to note that this is one of two places in the *FSR* that mentions counsel, or input, from subordinates. The other is reserved for the senior commander of the artillery 87 pages later. Given the tone of the command and staff chapter in the *FSR*, it was clear that the staff's, as subordinates, real value is only as an extension of the commander as the "master mind." A trained staff allowed the commander to fulfill the cultural expectation to retain control of a complex, but still rational battlefield. The continued insistence on the commander as solely responsible for all the events of battle is in effect a centralized command philosophy in everything but name.

Far from changing the assumptions that existed in pre-war thought, the 1923 further reinforces them. One of the strongest admonitions in the new *FSR* was condemnation of attempts to share decision-making responsibility.

[C]onjectures, expectations, reasons for measures adopted, and detailed instructions for a variety of possible outcomes do not inspire confidence and should be avoided. The commander should accept the entire responsibility. In framing field orders, such expressions as 'attempt to capture,' 'try to hold,' 'as far as possible,' 'as well as you can,' etc., are forbidden. They tend to divide responsibility between the commander and his subordinates.⁸⁶

The *FSR* intentionally made authority and responsibility synonymous. Commanders remain singularly responsible for all that occurs on the battlefield. The power of the cultural assumption surrounding a commander's responsibility is so powerful that conveying an intention was forbidden to avoid creating a perception that subordinate decision-making is acceptable.

⁸⁶War Department, *Field Service Regulations 1923*, 7. It is worth noting that this directive not to share "reasons for measures adopted" immediately precedes the paragraph detailing when letters of instruction, a structure that is much more conducive to mission orders, are advisable.

The minimal change to expectations of subordinate behavior directly paralleled those about commander behavior. Doctrine was more complex in its description, but it was an effort to bolster the unchanged underlying assumption. Almost immediately, the vehement insistence on obedience disappeared from the espoused values of the Army. However, removing the demand for mechanical obedience was a superficial change. Discussions of morale and leadership fill this void. However, these are expectations of commander behavior intended to secure the same end as mechanical obedience. As no new espoused value replaced mechanical obedience, a subordinates' value remained in executing orders. Indicative of this, the Army classified officers in only two categories: "Class A officers, qualified for promotion in due course; or as Class B officers, officers who should be removed from service."⁸⁷ This cultural evaluation of subordinates was reinforced by the texts utilized at the Leavenworth schools, which described the commander's duty as to "produce individual or collective military action or non-action on the part of subordinates, regardless of the will of the latter."⁸⁸ If the will of subordinates is unimportant, what utility can they provide other than obedience? Clearly the impetus for centralized control remained.

The 1923 *FSR* more thoroughly explored and identified fighting spirit and morale as further responsibilities of the leader. However, it is in the professional journals that the study of human dynamics comes to the forefront. A 1920 article in the *Infantry Journal* by Colonel Robert McCleave epitomizes the struggle to capture the lessons of

⁸⁷Schifferle, "So Rigorously Trained and Educated," 93.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 99.

encountering both a battlefield and a leadership dynamic that proved monumentally more complex than previously described within the existing framework of underlying assumptions. His article is a prime example of massive construct that is required to fit the experiences of the First World War into the prewar cultural framework.

McCleave's article was a prototypical example of the mental gymnastics required to reconcile experience and culture. Unsurprisingly, he followed the cultural trend and forced the accepted assumptions of commander responsibility onto the shaken foundations of rational combat. It is, in sum, a vision of the reconciliation between the assumption of sole responsibility and the cataclysmic combat of the First World War. Again, it made it clear that the elements of the equation that produces victory have grown but the solution has not. In his conclusion he listed 23 points of consideration for the commander to secure victory, then states "all are essential," then adds, three more. Commanders must gather an enormous amount of information prior to making the decision that will secure victory, however they remain solely responsible to do so. The largest actual change in the espoused values is his insistence on the moral fortitude of the troops. The new espoused values in support of ultimate responsibility are worth examining in detail. They exhibit a reinforcement of the commander as the centerpiece of victory, and present good leadership as an ingredient in ensuring that subordinates do not hinder the commander in securing victory. First, "the war demonstrated clearly there is no limit save in the moral of the troops and their leaders, and that no troops are beaten until they admit the fact." Second, "and above all, the faith in victory, magnificent fruit of the moral preparation of the troops, pursued untiringly by the leaders." Third, "infantry

must be highly trained and disciplined to a degree that leaves no breaking point.” To

ensure clarity McCleave summarized, “[w]e say then that the valor of the troops, above all their morale, depends in great measure on the valor of the leaders.”⁸⁹

McCleave’s observations that something was missed in the prewar leader-subordinate relationships were echoed in the reflections of other leaders. In the words of one AEF battalion commander:

[T]hree months of intensive exercise and the most superficial training in the theory of leadership have naturally failed to impress this human material, though it is of the finest quality with the true quality of officers. . . . Their intelligence, enthusiasm, energy and potential capacity for leadership are in no sense satisfactory substitutes for the knowledge and experience which in the main they lack.⁹⁰

Clearly, the 1914 construction of a rational battlefield and construct to “issue an order and be obeyed” were found lacking in the experience of World War I.

Commander’s required more knowledge to make the construct work. Knowledge and training to ensure the moral fortitude of the troops was also required. However, the bedrock of the cultural assumption remains the same commanders through knowledge and training will secure victory. This cultural baseline remained unquestioned; a large effort was required to make experience fit into the cultures conception of the world.

Clearly, the additional work was undertaken through schooling and staff improvement to enable the commander to perform as expected. It is a classic example of the power of

⁸⁹Robert McCleave, “Infantry, Its Role, Capabilities, Limitations and Relation to Other Arms,” *Infantry Journal* 17 (November 1920): 443-448.

⁹⁰Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 99.

underlying assumptions to drive behavior and directly mirrors Schein's assertion that a culture will resist evidence that its underlying assumptions are incorrect by compensating elsewhere.

When viewed in total, the logic that underlay the network of underlying cultural assumptions that explain behavior, specifically adoption of a command philosophy, was beginning to fracture. Tracing the conception of combat from the 1923 *FSR* to the Tentative 1939 *FSR* (FM 100-5) provides an intriguing picture of the devolution of the rational battlefield presented in the 1914 *FSR*. The prewar construct was coherent: a commander was solely responsible because his knowledge empowered him to control a rational battlefield and obedient soldiers would execute his orders to secure victory. However, the Army experienced an exponentially complex battlefield in the First World War I and a thinking enemy. Furthermore, combat experience created an expectation for commanders to exhibit leadership and other considerations for the morale, endurance, and capacity of subordinates to ensure execution of orders. The culture initially shoehorned the experiences into the prewar underlying assumptions. This monumentally complex but still rational battlefield required a better school system and a trained staff to augment the commander's ability to gather information and monitor the status of his subordinates. The culture compensated by redoubling its efforts to ensure commanders could control the battlefield and subordinates—empowering them to deliver victory and therein fulfill expectations of commander behavior.

The construct was cumbersome and by the mid-1930s the understanding of combat was altered significantly. Two publications in 1939 encompassed a pivotal

moment in the study of command philosophy in the U.S. Army. They were a culmination of the slow resolution of the issues with the network of underlying assumptions that emerged from the First World War. They depicted a very different battlefield, but a minimally altered conceptualization of how leaders and subordinates functioned. The first evidence of an attempt to formally resolve the complexity of the battlefield was the change to doctrine issued in 1939. *The Tentative Field Service Regulations 1939* was also entitled FM 100-5 *Operations* and was released as a part of a set with FM 100-10 *Administration*, and FM 100-15 *Large Units*. To meet the complex demands of the battlefield doctrine moved from one set of field regulations to a series of field manuals.⁹¹

This change was not superficial; the conceptualizations of combat contained in the 1939 FM 100-5 were radically different from their predecessors. It repeatedly and definitively described combat as containing a capable enemy acting on an irrational battlefield.

The situations that arise in war are numerous. They are subject to sudden and frequent change. Frictions and mistakes are common occurrences. Since the enemy is also free to act, situations seldom develop as expected. . . . Imponderable factors often exercise a decisive influence. While certain principles, deduced from experience, serve as a useful guide, their application varies according to circumstances.⁹²

This sentiment is not isolated. There has been a distinct change in the culture's understanding of combat. It was no longer so complex that it approaches unmanageable proportions, it was in fact irrational. The rise of the enemy as an independent and capable

⁹¹Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, 143.

⁹²War Department, Office of the Chief of Staff, *FM 100-5 Operations: Tentative Field Service Regulations 1939* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1939), 27.

actor also added an enormous amount of uncertainty in the conceptualization of combat. The FM was also explicit in this explanation, “In campaign, exact conclusions concerning the enemy can seldom be drawn.”⁹³ Repeatedly describing a perception of combat where “[i]n spite of the most careful planning and anticipation, unexpected obstacles and frictions will arise in combat” points to an understanding heavily influenced by Carl von Clausewitz’s conceptions of war as chaos.

Clausewitz more directly appears in another major 1939 publication *Infantry in Battle* published by the Infantry Journal, which states:

It has been well said that "in war all is simple, but it is the simple which is difficult." Misunderstandings, misleading information, late orders, the fact that troops are not actually where the higher commanders think they are, often result in units being engaged aimlessly.⁹⁴

Infantry in Battle also provided insight into the independence of the cultural assumptions surrounding command from those concerning combat. Despite the introduction of Clauswitzian friction commanders remain solely responsible for the outcome of battle. In over eighty historical examples, commanders encounter the gamut of combat, and employ techniques from the doctrinally sound to the absurd. However, cultural judgment was based on success not on the method employed.⁹⁵ This dissociation between the

⁹³War Department, *Field Service Regulations 1939*, 55.

⁹⁴It is important to note *Infantry in Battle* was first published in 1936 and revised in 1939. However, in its own words, “The second edition of *Infantry in Battle* is not a mere reprint. The entire book has been extensively revised.” Infantry Journal Incorporated, *Infantry in Battle* (Richmond, VA: Garret and Masse, 1939), 139.

⁹⁵Particularly illustrative of this point is example 4 of the chapter on “Rules” where a commander calls for enemy artillery fire on his own men in the open to force them forward in the attack on pages 10-14. However, the examples of decisions and tactics only justifiable by success are numerous.

commander's responsibility for employing a proper method and his responsibility for securing victory is a critical distinction. There was no longer a belief in an approved solution; however, the commander's obligation to find the correct solution was unaltered. The paradigm of sole responsibility was now divorced from the Army's conception of a chaotic battlefield. Instead of a belief based on combat, it was now an axiomatic truth: commanders are solely responsible for victory because they are commanders.

The 1939 FM 100-5 made it clear that a commander remained solely responsible for the uncontrollable. The field manual describes the preeminent leadership trait as responsibility, "a willingness to accept responsibility is the foremost trait of leadership."⁹⁶ More substantive evidence of the continuity between the underlying assumptions of command of the 1923 *FSR* are the entire paragraphs on command that appear in the 1939 manual. Within the first paragraph of the command and staff chapter was the same requirement written verbatim that in any command the "commander must be the master mind" and the "controlling head."⁹⁷ The structure of the staff as an extension of the commander was also taken word for word, to include the paragraph outlining the need to prevent subordinates from influencing decisions.⁹⁸ Similarly, the pattern of preceding or following a section supportive of mission orders philosophy with a starkly centralized driven paragraph continued. Subordinates who select a poor course

⁹⁶War Department, *Field Service Regulations 1939*, 32.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 33.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 35.

of action are no longer warned they could be annihilated on an expended assault.

However, the manual remained clear on the consequences of straying from orders:

If the mission turns out to be inadequate or if the situation on which it is predicated has changed, these altered conditions must be considered by the commander. . . . Should he decide to defer his mission or change his line of action, this fact must be reported to the superior without delay. In any event the subordinate assumes full responsibility for the consequences of his decision. The criterion by which he judges the soundness of his decisions is that it will further the intentions of the higher commander.⁹⁹

Without context this paragraph could reasonably support a mission orders philosophy.

However, if responsibility cannot be ‘divided’ between a commander and a subordinate, even if that subordinate is also a commander, then if a subordinate does not diverge from his orders the responsibility for failure is the commander’s. A decision to exercise initiative therefore becomes low reward for enormous risk. Particularly in the same culture that wrote *Infantry in Battle* and put successful blunders above tactically sound failures. No matter how rational the circumstance for diverging from orders any lack of success will be indefensible. ‘Mercutio’s’ canned commanders and slide rule tacticians were still educated to equate a failure to find the correct solution as a deficiency in education or motivation. This raises the level of confidence required for exercising initiative to near certainty. To return to the unnamed lieutenant of the *Cavalry Journal* it seems best to avoid being ‘jumped on’ by simply executing what is already approved. The admonitions against any attempt to share responsibility also undermine a mission orders philosophy because this construct requires a single point of success or failure; command. Where that single point of failure falls on the chain of command is either the

⁹⁹Ibid., 58-59.

senior commander, who was thus incentivized to control as much as possible, or the first subordinate commander, to diverge from the issued orders.

The cultural assumptions that surrounded subordinate interaction with leaders also reflected changes, but functionally the value of subordinates changed little. It is a much more complex process to secure the same end as before, the execution of the commander's orders. The 1939 FM 100-5 clearly incorporated emphasis and study of the human dimension in war. The second paragraph of the "Command and Staff" chapter made it clear that human dynamics were now understood as more complex than obedience. "The commander should have three conceptions ever before him: the moral and physical state of his command as a whole, the material conditions under which he is operating, and the capabilities of the enemy. A good commander avoids subjecting his troops to useless hardships; he guards against dissipating their combat strength in inconsequential actions or harassing them through faulty staff management."¹⁰⁰ It is obvious that under the new conception, an effective chain of command had to consider far more factors than previously acknowledged. However, the introduction of a chapter entitled "Troop Leading" to the capstone doctrine was toward the same end as before, effective execution of the mastermind's, or commander's plan. Leadership serves to "inspire confidence" and more importantly, "to assure himself that his orders are understood and properly executed." The manual then reminds commander's that independent action by subordinates was to be carefully monitored and subordinates function best when they efficiently execute the commander's plan. "He gives his

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 33.

subordinates appropriate freedom of action so long as this does not jeopardize his plans.”¹⁰¹ Cultural assumptions surrounding subordinates still provide little reassurance of their competence, and direct prohibition of allowing them to contribute or improve planning points to minimal change in the underlying assumptions of the contribution of subordinates to the battlefield. Moss’ conception of the commander as the lone animating spirit of a mass of men and machines remains firmly in the cultures’ consciousness at the close of the interwar period.

The year 1939 is a milestone in the study of command philosophy in the U.S. Army. While substantive change occurred, it did not affect two of the primary drivers of command philosophy implementation. The sole responsibility of the commander remains a preeminent assumption, and it remains tied to his ability to function as the mastermind and secure victory. Additionally the role of subordinate leaders remains execution of the senior commander’s plan. Critical to understanding the cultural change in the interwar period was the insulation of assumptions about the commander, which were no longer tied to the perceived reality of combat. The change in conception of combat from mathematical, logical, and orderly to chaotic and disorderly should have suggested a different role for the commander and thus a change in command philosophy—but neither change occurred. The logical link between the realities of combat and the role of the commander were abandoned. The expectations of commander behavior, reinforced earlier in the interwar period, were retained in their entirety. Cultural assumptions about the commander were isolated from battlefield reality by emphasizing the role of the

¹⁰¹Ibid., 56-57.

commander in securing victory despite acknowledging his reduced ability to dictate the events of battle. The continued minimization of the expectations and positive impact of subordinates reinforced resistance to a mission orders philosophy. Despite massive improvements in the professional education system, and a real focus on creating a staff system to support modern war, the army continued to emphatically rely on one mind to deliver victory: the commander.

CHAPTER 4

COMMAND PHILOSOPHY IN THE ARMY OF THE 1980s

Another period of massive change resulting in the reexamination of cultural assumptions was the post-Vietnam reconstruction of the army, culminating in the release and implementation of AirLand Battle concepts. In a massive shift from the two previous periods command philosophy was directly addressed by doctrine, and a mission orders philosophy was advocated as early as the 1976 version of FM 100-5, *Operations* as a method of compensating for the changed nature of combat. Another notable change from the previous periods was the return of logical coherence to the nature of conflict and the espoused values surrounding the commander in official publications. Both the 1982 and 1986 versions of FM 100-5 painted a picture of a radically altered battlefield, and arguably a fundamentally altered world where the Army would operate. Phrases that described combat as “unprecedented [in] scope and intensity” and “chaotic, intense, and highly destructive” more so than “previously experienced” were common.¹⁰²

This indicated the Army’s conception of combat had changed, and the Army recognized a need to change with it. In short, both versions of FM 100-5 envisioned a massive war against an enemy of equal technology and superior mass. They were logical and well-reasoned avocations that victory must now be garnered through more intangible means such as combat readiness, and rapid decision making at lower levels. However, the expectation of a mastermind commander-controller survived.

¹⁰²Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), 1-2.

It is difficult to determine what portion of the Army was operating under a predominantly centralized command philosophy and what portion defaulted to mission orders. However, it is clear that both command philosophies were in practice during the period. Despite official sanction of a mission orders philosophy and a coherent ideological package that attempted to link envisioned combat with command behavior, existing centralized philosophy behavior and underlying assumptions continued. Study of the professional journals of the period reveals telling parallels to the underlying assumptions of the interwar period. Though the cultural assumptions on future conflict were generally accepted, conceptions of command philosophy remained disconnected from those same assumptions. Over time artifacts like the Combat Training Centers forced a change in behavior. However, their ability to alter preferred behavior was much less potent. A significant portion of the culture continued to believe that commanders were still the sole source of victory—because they would control and act as the mastermind while subordinates executed.

Arguably, the change in the cultural assumptions about the nature of conflict started as early as the 1976 edition of FM 100-5. It envisioned Soviet forces that were at least equals in technology and capable of generating superior mass. It stated:

[d]uring the past several decades, the nature of battle has changed—not abruptly but nonetheless significantly. **Today's battlefield presents challenges beyond any the US Army has ever faced.** Great numbers of weapons of advanced destructiveness . . . spread the latest military technology throughout the world.¹⁰³

¹⁰³Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 2-1.

This sentiment continued in the 1982 and 1986 version, “[p]otential enemies of the U.S. will probably field large quantities of high-quality weapon systems whose range and lethality equal or exceed our own.”¹⁰⁴ All three capstone manuals also introduce entire chapters on electronic warfare, the use of chemical weapons, and the tactical use of nuclear weapons and make mention that any future combat will involve joint and international partners. There is clearly a belief that combat has fundamentally changed and therefore the army must change to meet the new challenge.

The 1982 version also succinctly summarized the intangibles that will compensate for the lack of materiel advantage within the AirLand Battle concept. “The fluid nature of modern war will place a premium on leadership, unit cohesion and effective, independent operations. The conditions of combat will be less forgiving of mistakes and more demanding of leader skill, imagination, and flexibility than any in history.”¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere, “[i]t [AirLand Battle] recognizes the nonquantifiable elements of combat power . . . most important, it emphasizes the human element: courageous, well trained soldiers and skillful, effective leaders.”¹⁰⁶ To maximize these unquantifiable elements requires mission orders. Put simply, “The chaos of battle will not allow absolute control. *As battle becomes more complex and unpredictable, decision making must become more decentralized.* Thus, all echelons of command will have to issue mission orders.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1982), 1-2.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 1-3.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 7-1.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 2-7.

Mission orders are required because they “convert initiative into agility” and allow subordinates to capitalize on “fleeting opportunities.”¹⁰⁸ In support of this directive are instructions that “[t]he complexities of modern combat make it increasingly important to concentrate on unit training programs for leaders. . . . [Commanders] must take time to train subordinate leaders.”¹⁰⁹ The AirLand battlefield demanded a synchronized and unified team that was ready to exploit any opportunity presented by the enemy or circumstance. It is an environment that no longer supports the single “master mind” of previous capstone doctrine. Because a “[command structure’s] primary measure of effectiveness is whether it functions efficiently and more quickly than the enemy’s.”¹¹⁰ At face value, this is a major shift in the primary measure of effectiveness for commanders and is suggestive that new expectations of commander behavior will be required to operate on the modern battlefield. However, there is little detail on how a commander will create a command structure that operates efficiently and quickly. AirLand Battle represented a nearly complete set of underlying assumptions, it was not only a “how to fight” manual it was also included a framework of beliefs supporting why to fight that way. It is important to note that the “why” was heavily tied to enemy capability.

The Department of the Army reinforced a new network of beliefs in FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*, published October 1983, FM 22-101, *Leadership Counseling*,

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 1-4.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 2-6.

published June 1985, and FM 22-102, *Soldier Team Development*, published March 1987. Literally walking from capstone manual down to the team level, it was a comprehensive explanation of the conception of combat and the command philosophy required to implement it. The manual also includes a network of beliefs and underlying assumptions that are required in support of a mission orders philosophy. The concepts remain closely tied to the vision of combat asserted in the capstone manuals.

Combat with a materially superior and technologically equal enemy is clearly the anchor of the leadership professed in FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*. Chapter 1 spends nearly half of its pages on a vignette from the future. “The Face of Future Battle” reinforces the leadership that is now required to produce victory on the battlefield. The vignette juxtaposes two company commanders: CPT Randall, who was strikingly successful, and CPT Alden who utterly failed. Reality parallels the predictions of capstone AirLand Battle doctrine in Randall’s words, “We had several messengers at battalion. Thank God for that. The radios were jammed most of the time, and the telephone wire was cut by artillery.”¹¹¹ Randall’s actions are also doctrinally impeccable as he leads his company to blunt a major penetration:

About 5 minutes after we arrived, the advance guard of the enemy battalion appeared. I informed the S3 so he could notify the attack helicopters and A10s. I could clearly see a column of tanks and infantry carriers rolling right into our ambush. When their lead vehicles hit the mines, I gave the order to open fire. A little later, attack helicopters and Air Force A10s attacked out of nowhere. The rear portion of their column tried to flank us, but they ran into the fires of attack helicopters, A10s, and mines. The front of the column tried to push forward, but

¹¹¹Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Military Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983), 29.

disabled vehicles blocked them. Then they tried to charge us; but we had the good ground.¹¹²

While the conduct of the engagement gives no clear indication of command philosophy, the vignette further investigates the causes of this tactical success and points to behaviors that indicate a mission orders philosophy. The only direct evidence of a mission orders philosophy in action comes after the main engagement. While returning to the main battalion position the company surprises enemy rear elements twice. Randall reports, “In each case an enlisted vehicle commander started a company attack drill.”¹¹³ Though subtle, the language is indicative—the vehicle commanders have committed a formation two echelons higher than their own to a course of action. They do not take appropriate vehicle commander actions, supported by appropriate action by the platoon leader and subsequently the company commander. There is no time for this ponderous construct in lethal modern combat. If fleeting opportunities are to be seized then decision cycles must be minimized. In Randall’s own words he was, appropriately, removed from the decision loop by the realities of modern combat. The remainder of the argument for a mission orders philosophy is indirect and points significantly to the prerequisites for successful implementation of a mission orders philosophy. Randall’s subordinates repeatedly point out that he listens to their thoughts and advice, that he insists that all leaders know their subordinates personally, and that all members of the company team train to not only proficiency but to leadership.

¹¹²Ibid., 31.

¹¹³Ibid.

Though somewhat understated in “The Face of Future Battle,” the importance of a mission orders philosophy and its supporting network of beliefs are reinforced elsewhere in FM 22-100. There is a clear theme that the realities of modern battle demand different leader actions. Some are clearly in direct conflict with the previously espoused leader actions. For example, the long held admonition against conferences with subordinate leaders that influence commander actions was completely reversed. “Good leaders learn from the perceptions, experience, and ideas of their subordinates,” appears emboldened in the margins of the chapter on “Leader and Unit Development Programs.”¹¹⁴ The espoused value of subordinates outside of execution of orders is a prerequisite of adopting a mission orders philosophy. Furthermore, the existence of a chapter on developing subordinate leaders and units is indicative that underlying assumptions about the value of subordinates has changed greatly since the 1930s. This development concept exists in addition to the espoused value of training subordinates. The preexisting belief that training subordinate leaders and units to efficiently execute orders can increase combat power has been greatly expanded. There was a belief that by developing subordinate leaders and units they could add to the combat power of the parent unit.

These concepts come to fruition four years later in 1987. FM 22-102, *Soldier Team Development*, arguably the most coherent doctrinal explanation of mission orders philosophy published by the U.S. Army. Again, adoption of mission orders philosophy is directly tied to the culture’s underlying assumptions about future combat:

The air-land battlefield will be more intense than any we have known before. Units throughout the battlefield will experience the shock of battle. . . . Combat

¹¹⁴Ibid., 255.

will be decentralized, with soldiers widely scattered and small teams isolated from higher command. . . . Highly lethal weapons systems and accompanying high casualty rates may leave sergeants commanding companies and privates leading platoons, sections, squads, and crews early in the battle.¹¹⁵

This challenging future demanded a mission orders philosophy. FM 22-102 delved further and provided a coherent set of beliefs that answered what leaders were to do in supporting the adoption of a mission orders philosophy that previous doctrinal releases. While justification for mission orders remains predominantly anchored in the conception of future combat, it also presented an alternate rationale for changing behavior. There are sections that advocate operating a mission orders philosophy simply because it is a better system. FM 22-102 directly addresses underlying assumptions about the role of leadership and the behavior of leaders independent of future combat. First, “Leaders in cohesive units give their subordinates planning and decision-making responsibilities.”¹¹⁶ Because, planning and decision making responsibilities increase the competence of subordinates, and “competence leads to mutual trust and confidence.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, there is innate value in training to a level where “each team member must be prepared to accept and execute leadership responsibilities at a moment’s notice.”¹¹⁸ And in the final analysis, “small groups of soldiers determine to a large extent whether wars are won or lost. Each basic group is part of a larger group. In the final analysis, the effectiveness of

¹¹⁵Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 22-102, *Soldier Team Development* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1987), v.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, v.

battalions and higher military units depends on the formation of these “families” in the smallest groups.”¹¹⁹ This final analysis was not a description of future combat, but an assessment of past performance.

This distinction is subtle but significant. It did not advocate an imposed change to compensate for a threat; it advocated a change because it is better in all circumstances. The sentence that each basic group is a part of a large group indicated a belief in the intrinsic value of a chain of leaders. In the context of trusted and trained subordinates, it suggested an entirely different source of the combat power that will bring victory: a series of capable leaders exercising their leadership at appropriate levels; the result is a formation that is more than the sum of its parts. A contemporary catch phrase summarized this claim, “Power Down to Power Up.”¹²⁰ In other words, a mission orders philosophy empowered lower level leaders. This series of empowered leaders resulted in increased combat power regardless of mission. How a subordinate is valued is the irreconcilable difference in command philosophies. A centralized philosophy values subordinates for skilled obedience, while a mission orders philosophy values subordinates’ talent to maximize the combat power of their commander and their subordinates. Furthermore, while FM 100-5 and FM 22-100 both provided significant sections on how to fight, and some explanation of why to fight that way, only FM 22-102 made them timeless. It is the first doctrinal manual to begin supplanting the existing expectations of commander and subordinate behavior.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 1.

¹²⁰Michael Shaler, “Leadership Challenges,” *Armor* (March-April 1983): 48.

However, it would be a mischaracterization to purport this as a direct confrontation with the legacy expectations of commander behavior. The manual does not discount the expectation that the commander will use his knowledge to determine the correct solution and secure victory. Most notably, FM 22-102's clarion and multi-faceted calls for mission orders philosophy were written for, "leaders at company level and below."¹²¹ It also clearly targeted leaders as opposed to commanders. Significantly the company commander only appears once, in the context of solidly integrating replacement soldiers in combat. This reluctance to specifically state behavioral expectations in support of mission orders philosophy is not isolated.

Close examination of higher echelon AirLand Battle era doctrine also reveals minimal direct confrontation with the preexisting underlying assumptions describing commander behavior. Returning to FM 22-100, *Military Leadership* with a view of the arguments of FM 22-102 in mind, reveals no parallel for the timeless or intrinsic reasons for mission orders. Given that FM 22-100 was written for "leaders operating at the working level companies, troops, batteries, squadrons, and battalions. Those leaders include sergeants, warrant officers, lieutenants, captains, and field grade officers."¹²² It is clear that the prescriptions for a mission orders philosophy for leaders within the company are not echoed as intrinsically valuable for commanders or leaders at higher levels. The construct of competence, trust, and empowered subordinates creating the conditions for victory from FM 22-102 is not present in FM 22-100. FM 22-100's

¹²¹Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 22-102, IV.

¹²²Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 22-100, 1.

justification for mission orders rest solely on the underlying assumptions about future combat. Repeatedly mission orders are advanced as a consequence of enemy action. Contrasting the manual's historical vignette against the "Face of Future Battle" vignette provides a clear example.

Colonel Joshua Chamberlin is justifiably extolled as a paragon of virtue and competence. His decision making at Little Round Top, his insistence on tough realistic training, ethics, and forceful leadership are all painted as timeless and essential to a peerless victory. However, the historiography of the vignette at best fails to challenge existing underlying assumptions about commander behavior and ignores an opportunity to illustrate the timeless value of a mission orders philosophy. Colonel Strong Vincent was Chamberlin's immediate commander at Gettysburg. The vignette minimizes Vincent's actions. It states, "Colonel Vincent immediately volunteered his brigade to defend Little Round Top."¹²³ Other sources give a much more detailed record of Vincent on the second day of Gettysburg. Vincent observed an orderly galloping from formation to formation who was obviously unable to find the intended recipient of his message. Vincent stopped the orderly and demanded the orderly give his orders. The orderly initially refused as his orders were for General James Barnes, Vincent's division commander. Vincent demanded them again and the orderly surrendered his orders, "Genl. Sykes directs Genl. Barnes to send a brigade of his division to occupy that hill yonder."¹²⁴ Vincent immediately responded, "I will take responsibility myself for taking

¹²³Ibid., 5.

¹²⁴Bradley M. Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 246-7.

my brigade there.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, Vincent’s mission orders to Chamberlin appear verbatim in both Chamberlin’s account and the vignette.¹²⁶ Unfortunately, they are not identified as such and FM 22-100 misses an opportunity to point out that their focus on the task to be accomplished, rather than how it was to be accomplished, allowed Chamberlin’s brilliant, if unorthodox, tactics in victory. Chamberlin’s memoirs do make the distinction, in his own words, “our orders to hold that ground had to be liberally interpreted.”¹²⁷

Also missed in the field manual’s account was that the initiative to start the famed bayonet charge was given to Captain Spear on the extreme left flank, both because of his location and because communication was difficult in the chaos of battle.¹²⁸ While Chamberlin clearly retained responsibility for the action, Spear had the authority to initiate the risky attack. Chamberlin’s character and appropriate decision-making are emphasized at the cost of describing the critical and equally appropriate decision making of both his seniors and subordinates. From the identification of Little Round Top as key terrain, by the corps commander to the final bayonet charge initiated by a company commander leaders secured victory at all levels—not through executing orders, but by taking their commander’s intent and determining how best to achieve it amidst the chaos

¹²⁵Ibid., 247.

¹²⁶Joshua L. Chamberlain, *Blood and Fire at Gettysburg* (Gettysburg, PA: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994), 10.

¹²⁷Ibid., 15.

¹²⁸Ibid., 22-3.

of modern combat. The selective presentation of history wrongly emphasized a single brilliant leader as ultimately responsible for victory.

Excluding mission orders philosophy from the historical vignette weakens the argument for adopting it. This action isolated the reason for adopting mission orders in the conception of future combat and failed to incorporate the expected behavior of commanders. This omission reduces the impetus for adopting a mission orders philosophy: it was a ‘new’ concept to compensate for Soviet mass and jammed radios. It was not advertised as timeless nor as empirically better than centralized command. Returning to the “Face of Future Battle” vignette again reveals a lack of confrontation with the network of beliefs that historically have demanded directive control. Specifically, the expectations of commander behavior remain strikingly similar to those of the interwar period.

As discussed above CPT Randall, the paragon of future battle, took appropriate actions that suggested the benefit of a mission orders philosophy. On the other hand, Randall’s foil CPT Alden failed so spectacularly as to prevent a simple diagnosis for his defeat. His failure was so convoluted that it makes little commentary on either centralized command or mission orders philosophy. His execution of a centralized control philosophy was so marred that the impression from the vignette is not that centralized control was inferior; it is that Alden’s character doomed him to failure. In Alden’s own words, “They’ll only fight if they’re more afraid of me than the enemy. I failed because I haven’t made them fear me enough. I know my career is on the line.”¹²⁹ He believed his

¹²⁹Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 22-100, 21.

soldiers were stupid, and lacking morally, “The only way to lead people like that is by fear. That’s all they understand.”¹³⁰ This is not the only overstated shortcoming of CPT Alden in the vignette. He poorly emplaced anti-tank weapons, disregarded terrain, failed to implement mutually supporting positions, and complained about his superiors and their decisions in such a manner that his subordinates were aware. The annihilation of Alden as a leader was so complete that the directive elements of his command style were lost in a sea of tactical, ethical and leadership errors. It is important to note that the expose of Alden’s leadership failings required a second vignette. In the second vignette, he handcuffs soldiers to the charge of quarter’s desk to prevent them from going AWOL to ensure his company’s statistics are to standard.¹³¹ The importance of competence and character are so overstated that it is entirely feasible for a leader already predisposed to centralized command to read tacit approval for it if executed properly. If Alden were not an immoral and incompetent leader, he would have been able to better control the outcome of the battle and secure victory.

The remainder of FM 100-22 continued to focus on the character and competence of leaders. Both subjects are neutral issues in a discussion of command philosophy; however, the justification for ethical and competent action is solely from a centralized perspective. In a parallel to “The Face of Future Battle”, incompetence and unethical action cause subordinates to stop executing the orders of a leader. While this is catastrophic to either command philosophy, there are additional reasons to be competent

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid., 74-5.

and ethical if operating a mission orders philosophy. First, if the rapid decision making cycle and “nonquantifiable” elements of combat power are going to deliver victory, trust is an absolute requirement throughout the chain of command. Inept and unethical behavior will prevent the generation of combat power at all levels that is the doctrinal solution to the modern battlefield. The leadership advocated in FM 22-100 can be summarized by its catchphrase of leadership “Be, Know, Do.” “Be, Know, Do” is an eloquent expression of good leadership, however the reason for good leadership has not changed since it was defined in the interwar period as, “ [to] produce individual or collective military action or non-action on the part of subordinates, regardless of the will of the latter.”¹³² Instead of expressing that a “Be, Know, Do” method of leadership inspires trust in both a leader’s commander and subordinates which allows maximum effectiveness of the chain of command in combat—“Be, Know, Do” was a modern maxim to ensure the mastermind was followed.

A review of the professional journals of the period displays the same widely accepted view of future combat as the driver of change. However, also it mirrors doctrine in its failure to definitively articulate expectations of commander and subordinate behavior in support of mission orders. Expectations of commander and subordinate behavior frequently appeared that would be just as appropriate in the interwar period or prior to World War I. These networks of belief demanded commander roles and responsibilities that were generally unchanged in the hundred years between them. The same constructs for commander identity, responsibility, and complimentary expectations

¹³²Schifferle, “So Rigorously Trained and Educated,” 99.

of subordinates continued to run counter to a mission orders philosophy. Despite the reasoned and logical argument to tie a change in the combat environment to a change in command philosophy, the contemporary professional journals indicate that the two sets of cultural assumptions continue to function independently for some officers. While these officers accepted the doctrinal concept of future combat, and espoused mission orders, the arguments they use reveal a mode of thinking driven by traditional assumptions about a commander's responsibilities, roles, and behaviors.

Colonel Andrew O'Meara's article, "The Price of Leadership" is an excellent example. It contains a number of phrases and concepts taken from doctrine. However, they are buttressed with arguments that would not be out of place in the previous case studies. He states, "professionalism is a commitment to excellence that is met daily. It is a commitment that acknowledges the leader's responsibility to be a teacher."¹³³

Reinforcing that leaders are empowered by knowledge, as they have "mastered the fundamentals of their profession."¹³⁴ In short he states that the leader's ultimate contribution, "will rest upon his ability to make the right decision when confronted by hard choices."¹³⁵ He shows that these hard decisions will be carried out through obedience. "Obedience is the test of our commitment. . . . When leaders cross the line of departure they do not look back. They accept obedience even though it places a unique

¹³³Andrew P. O'Mera, "The Price of Leadership," *Armor* (November-December 1982): 45.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

demand on their leadership.”¹³⁶ It is only marginally significant that obedience is now a burden of leadership rather than an expectation. Arguably, it is the same end state as the pre-World War I paradigm with a reduced emphasis on paternalism; now implied as the burden of obedience.

His construction is anathema to a mission orders philosophy: he does not envision timely or appropriate action by subordinates; he acknowledges that he must think for them and is therefore burdened. A leader remains empowered by knowledge, responsible to secure victory by making the right decision, which will be executed by his subordinates. O’Meara returns to the same unifying and intensifying belief to reinforce this set of commander expectations; sole responsibility.

He concludes his article by relating the exchange between General Robert Lee and General George Pickett at the close of Gettysburg. He extolls Lee’s courage and quotes him in accepting responsibility, “This has been my fight, and upon my shoulders rests the blame . . . your men have done all that men can do. The fault is entirely my own.”¹³⁷ It is ironic that the paragon of officer virtue O’Meara selects is Lee who lost fighting a battle his subordinates counseled against.¹³⁸ The senior commander’s ultimate responsibility is admirable and neutral in the command philosophy discussion; however when it is tied to a decision that determines victory it becomes sole responsibility and is heavily oriented to a centralized philosophy.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg*, 401.

O'Meara is not alone in cobbling together the vision of future combat and its demands for mission orders with existing underlying assumptions about commander and subordinate behavior. For example:

One who has never been there can't begin to imagine the confusion that prevails in a battle, be it a patrol skirmish or a full scale combat involving divisions, corps, and armies. It just gets worse as the action expands. And the commander who possesses the clear-headedness—the cold-bloodedness, if you will—to see through the mental fog of confusion, who unerringly makes the right decision and who maneuvers accordingly, will be the winner.¹³⁹

This is an interesting summary of the acceptance of the doctrinal description of combat and its implications, and the continued reverence for the existing norms of commander behavior. A commander is expected to cut through the overwhelming chaos of modern battle, ascertain the right answer and see it speedily enacted by his subordinates.

The power of the old underlying assumptions is also clear in Lieutenant Colonel Michael Shaler's "Leadership Challenges." He laments that "we are still plagued by empire builders who consolidate power and information and hold on to both with dear life."¹⁴⁰ Though he is lamenting those who stand in the way of mission orders, his own understanding still revolves around a mastermind who is now challenged to "learn that his role is not one of domination over his subordinates, but [to] . . . make them feel like the originators of ideas."¹⁴¹ He does not expect that as a commander he will actually benefit from any intellect but his own—he simply concedes that he must now make his subordinates think that he is. Again, additional responsibilities burden pre-existing

¹³⁹R. E. Rogge, "Confusion—a Winner and a Loser," *Armor* (May-June 1984): 48.

¹⁴⁰Shaler, "Leadership Challenges," 49.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 48.

constructs of commander behavior, rather than suggesting changes to reap the promised gains of a mission orders philosophy.

The three part series on a regimental cavalry troop in combat from *Armor* is particularly telling of the power of the cultural expectations of the commander. The complexities of the AirLand Battle are distilled into a series of tactical decisions complete with approved solutions that would have been at home Morrison's classroom at the turn of the century. While there is clearly value in educating leaders with map based scenarios, problems presented by the enemy, and isolation of a feasible solution, this construct readily reinforces the network of beliefs that advocate a centralized command style. The article presented a flattened chain of command, the squadron commander appears as an extra; and platoon leaders are equal in their ability and eagerness to execute exactly what they are told. The enemy is predictable and fails to deviate from his own doctrine. Reducing the complexity of the chain of the command and enemy rapidly lends itself to a simplified construct of a single mastermind determining the approved solution, executed by subordinates who are capably trained to make the commander's plan into reality without complication. Little has changed since the "Morrison Men" learned the same lesson; a single commander empowered by knowledge makes the right decision and secures victory.

The professional journals also give insight into an extremely powerful reinforcing tool of the AirLand Battle era. Combat Training Centers were created to simulate the challenge of battle as realistically as possible and move "bloodlessly a notch higher along

the combat learning curve.”¹⁴² They performed exceptionally. The National Training Center (NTC) dominated the pages of *Armor*, *Infantry*, and *Field Artillery*.¹⁴³ For example, *Armor* ran multi-page articles on how to succeed at the NTC at least semi-annually throughout the period. Titles ranged from “Fighting Smart at the NTC,” to “Objective NTC” and its influence as a driver of behavior was unmatched in the period.¹⁴⁴ The desire to succeed in the ‘combat’ of the NTC and other training centers appears nearly universally in the professional journals of the time. Comments such as, “Talk is cheap, and faking is painfully apparent at the NTC” were commonplace.¹⁴⁵ Multiple laudatory comments about the pace and realism of simulated combat were just as prevalent. In this way, the NTC became the battleground for the confrontation between the underlying assumptions about commander behavior and the realities of future combat. Artifacts from the NTC exhibit a pattern of continual improvement in performance and of units learning the value of operating under mission orders.

The first two years of the NTC were particularly challenging for commanders and units. There is evidence that initially, “experiences at the NTC show that in many units subordinates lack a sense of responsibility as thinking actors. They are used to their

¹⁴²Robert H. Scales, *Certain Victory: The US Army and in the Gulf War* (New York, NY: Potomac Books Inc., 2006), 22.

¹⁴³Combat Training Centers at Fort Chaffe and Hohenfels, Germany operated in parallel. However, the historical record is more expansive about events at National Training Center at Fort Irwin.

¹⁴⁴Michael D. Furlong, “Fighting Smart at the National Training Center,” *Armor* (May-June 1984): 26.

¹⁴⁵Alan R. Cocks, “Objective: NTC,” *Armor* (July-August 1986): 11.

commanders doing their tactical thinking for them.”¹⁴⁶ And that subordinates willing executed inappropriate or flawed orders simply because they were orders.¹⁴⁷

Contemporary journal articles by officers who struggled at the NTC echo the frustrations of those who followed the cultural expectations for officers to perform their duties in a centralized manner:

It’s frustrating. There is no way to assemble all your people and say, ‘look we’ve got to do better. ’You plan and you visualize how it will work and yet you can’t get to that TC [tank commander] who skylines himself on a hill or the platoon that goes the wrong way. I’ve been averaging maybe 3 hours of sleep a night. First couple of nights, no problem. About the fourth night it started to have an effect on us. People falling asleep during an OPORD [operations order]. You find people start cutting corners a little.¹⁴⁸

The numerous articles in the professional journals that centered on beating the opposing force (simulated enemy) give evidence to the friction this constructed battlefield produced.

However, over time the formations trained at the NTC learned, improved and adapted. These were not map problems with approved solutions; they were real world simulations complete with videotape and after action mentoring by observer controllers. After seven years, units started consistently beating the opposing force.¹⁴⁹ It is important to note these units were on their third or fourth rotation, and based on the timespan most

¹⁴⁶John T. Nelson II, “Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle,” *Parameters* (September 1987): 32.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸Charles R. Steiner Jr., “Thunder in the Desert,” *Armor* (May-June 1982): 12-13.

¹⁴⁹Scales, *Certain Victory*, 32.

leaders were operating with firsthand experience of the challenge of leading and losing at least one level lower. Concurrent with the increased proficiency displayed at the NTC was an increased effort to alter centralized command behavior. The “lessons-learned” publications are clear indicators that the NTC battlefield was increasingly designed to reinforce both the doctrinal vision of war and the premium it placed on mission orders. By 1985, a “lessons-learned” bulletin stated, “battalion commanders who attempted detailed control over even a portion of their forces are usually overwhelmed by the tempo of the enemy’s attack.”¹⁵⁰

The trend of specifically targeting under performance rooted in centralized command behavior continued. An entire section of the *Combat Training Center’s Lessons Learned* for January 1988 is entitled “Get Some Sleep”:

At the NTC [National Training Center], sleep deprivation causes leaders at all levels to make mistakes and decisions which directly or indirectly cause the ‘death’ of not only themselves but their units. Some examples are: giving incoherent orders, forgetting important tactical intelligence, issuing contradictory instructions, or simply falling asleep in a location unknown to subordinates.¹⁵¹

The scenario was designed to overwhelm centralized commanders and the after action reviews designed to show the value of executing the command philosophy advanced and partially advocated in doctrine.

A substantial portion of the bulletin also statistically defends the number of commander’s “killed” at the NTC. It pointed out that the proportion of commanders lost

¹⁵⁰Nelson, “Auftragstaktik,” 28.

¹⁵¹Michael Foncannon, ed., “Command Continuity on the AirLand Battlefield No. 88-1,” *CTC Lessons Learned* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center For Army Lessons Learned, 31 January 1988), 10.

was reflective of U.S. numbers in World War II and the Israeli experience in the 1973 war. The learning point from the lessons learned document can be distilled to an admonition of the complaints about lost commanders, and promotion of better planning for continuity after the loss of the commander.¹⁵² In the event that a commander successfully remained the ‘mastermind’ of his formation, the simulated battlefield could still defeat his formation—by removing him from it. The evidence suggests that behavior at the NTC was being modified by a heavily reinforced vision of future combat. Yet this trend also failed to achieve permanence.

While the NTC provided a powerful reinforcing tool for the realities of modern combat the underlying assumptions of commander and subordinate behavior demanded other solutions to the issues presented. In this way it changed behavior, but for at least a portion of the culture it did not change preferred behavior. Because doctrine and the NTC experience overwhelmingly tied mission orders to the conditions of combat, if the problems posed by the battlefield could be redressed in another manner it would be an equally acceptable solution. Major General Fredrick Brown summarizes the line of reasoning in his article “The Commander’s Need for Positive Control”

[O]ur doctrine accommodates the change by adopting the concept of mission orders . . . to do this well, the leader needs information. And we can not give him enough information—at least right now—to allow him to act within the enemy’s decision loop. . . . The long term solution to many of these deficiencies is the Battlefield Management System.¹⁵³

¹⁵²Ibid., 8-11.

¹⁵³Fredrick Brown, “The Commander’s Need For Positive Control,” *Armor* (September-October 1985): 4-5.

While the phrases are doctrinal, the construct was heavily influenced by the legacy construct of commander behavior. If the commander had more information he could select the right answer within the enemy's decision cycle, i.e. if the conditions on the battlefield can be altered then legacy expectations can be reconciled and commanders will no longer be forced to operate in a suboptimal manner.

Similarly, caution against the siren song of technology that promises to reduce chaos and friction on the battlefield can be found in articles that zealously advocate adoption of a mission orders philosophy. "The Army is developing two pieces of communications equipment that could provide senior commanders with the capability of readily micromanaging subordinate units. . . . One can only imagine the temptation a brigade commander would have to try and maneuver platoons [if their precise location were displayed on a screen in his operations center and he could immediately speak with the unit displayed]." ¹⁵⁴ The author was clearly concerned that such technology would be immediately used to bring about a centralized command philosophy.

In addition to future technology, significant reorganization could also address the demands of the modern battlefield while accommodating the underlying assumptions of commander behavior. In essence, the 1985 Combat Studies Institute's *The Directed Telescope: A Traditional Element of Effective Command* is an alternative to mission orders philosophy that is congruous with the legacy underlying assumptions governing commander and subordinate behavior. The Combat Studies Institute was commissioned to provide "a historical study of commanders' use of aides, liaison officers, observers,

¹⁵⁴Nelson, "Auftragstaktik," 33.

observers, and other representatives in the course of campaigns and battles.”¹⁵⁵ It holds that the commander’s role is an “unending quest for certainty” that has “never been fully satisfied.”¹⁵⁶ However, it advocates that placing trusted subordinates outside of the chain of command to monitor subordinates and expedite the flow of information has proven the most successful approximation of success in this quest. Notably there is an academic jab at General Robert E. Lee who “relied heavily on simple mission-oriented orders.”¹⁵⁷ Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery is the paragon of the study, and his liaison system for maintaining “grip” on both his subordinates and the tactical situation is extolled as a superb solution to the chaos of combat. Favorable parallels are drawn to Patton’s use of the Army Information System to monitor subordinate nets in the Third Army. In summary it is a modification of the chain of command where the most promising and capable leaders are removed from the chain of command to ensure the senior commander is rapidly armed with as much information as possible so he can make the correct decision rapidly. It proposes to conquer chaos with information, and to do so through reorganizing to empower the senior commander, a clear centralized rebuttal to mission orders in the face of modern combat.

Both the technologists and the advocates of reorganization accepted that the chaos of the battlefield would force the commander to operate under suboptimal conditions. Both responded with hope that the chaos could be reduced and commanders could to

¹⁵⁵Gary B. Griffen, *The Directed Telescope: A Traditional Element of Effective Command* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1985), vii.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 12.

return to centralized behavior. It is clear that their behavior was mission orders philosophy oriented—but their preferred behavior remained to operate in a centralized manner.

In summary, the AirLand Battle renaissance achieved only partial success in changing command philosophy. For the first time doctrine overtly advocated a mission orders philosophy. It rationally anchored mission orders philosophy to a vision of future combat that was rapid, lethal, and chaotic. However, the argument did not extend to an open confrontation with the proven and accepted expectations of command and subordinate behavior. Underlying assumptions that demanded commanders understand the battlefield and provide an answer that secured victory remained significant drivers of behavior for a portion of the culture. This led to divergent understandings of what behavior held the best chance of producing victory. First, mission orders philosophy pointed to a trained and empowered chain of command providing victory through rapid and appropriate decision making at multiple echelons. Simultaneously, residual expectations of commander behavior demanded that commanders control the action and implement the correct solution for victory. The NTC proved a powerful arbitrator of this dispute, but for ardent believers in centralized expectations of commander behavior the impact was limited to the Mojave Desert. These leaders were simply forced to command in a sub-optimal mission orders fashion. The ardent commander-as-controller believers sought alternative solutions to the problems posed by the modern battlefield. It is clear that the same expectations of commanders survived the AirLand battle period despite conflict with doctrine and difficulty accommodating modern combat. In a direct parallel

to the close of the interwar period, the battlefield demanded one set of behaviors and cultural expectations demanded another. Without a definitive set of replacement expectations for commander behavior cognitive dissonance remained an accepted part of the culture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Examining the historical interaction of mission orders philosophy and the culture of the U.S. Army reveals some significant trends. First, the cultural view of mission orders philosophy has become more favorable over time. The philosophy can be traced from isolated advocates prior to World War I to doctrine by the 1980s. Mission orders and its philosophy moved from a divergent minority belief to at least an espoused value of the majority of the culture. However, it has taken an excessive amount of time and required considerable effort to do so.

In the same period, a portion of the culture continuously provided strong intellectual resistance and behaved differently. This centralized command tradition also marshals logical arguments for necessity and improved performance on the battlefield. Each philosophy has advantages, and both purport a better chance of success in combat. The difference in the behavior of a commander, or a chain of command, is a belief of what will bring victory. This belief rests on other networks of belief. This study identified at least three distinct underlying assumptions supporting adoption of a command philosophy. Beliefs about future combat, beliefs about command, and beliefs about the role of subordinates all heavily influence adoption of a philosophy of command.

In the years preceding World War I, Army culture understood combat as a rational event that approached a science—a trained professional could understand, predict, and control events on the battlefield. Commanders were expected to understand the situation they faced, deduce the correct solution, and issue a clear order to enact their

solution on the battlefield. Sole responsibility fell on the commander as the mastermind of success. Subordinates were only expected to mechanically obey orders.

During the interwar period a major change in the culture's expectations of combat occurred. Initially the culture reacted to the enormity of World War I within its prewar underlying assumptions about combat, commanders, and subordinates. Consequently, doctrine and professional writings described future combat as exponentially more complex than previously. This resulted in improvements to commander's training and greatly increased focus on the staff that would support the commander as the mastermind of victory. However, the ponderous construct of combat as incredibly complex soon gave way to a more simplistic understanding.

Starting in the 1930s, combat was officially depicted as chaotic and unpredictable. This enormous change did not significantly alter the underlying assumptions about commanders or subordinates. Commanders remained empowered by their intellect to identify the solution that would bring victory in combat and subordinates were expected to execute that solution. In short, the cultural expectation of commanders was to solve an equation without a definitive answer and to control what was admittedly uncontrollable. This was a critical development in the impact of underlying assumptions on cultural behavior. Underlying assumptions that described cultural understanding of combat were logically divorced from expectations of commanders. The loss of a coherent rationale for sole commander responsibility did not lessen its ability to drive behavior. The commander remained the focal point for victory and was expected to mastermind and control his way to it. Furthermore, underlying assumptions about subordinate conduct

remained tied to expectations of command behavior. The responsibility of the commander expanded in relation to subordinates as morale or fighting spirit was introduced as an additional duty of the commander. However, the subordinates distilled role remained execution of the commander's plan.

The evolution of AirLand Battle doctrine encompassed mission orders and espoused the value of mission orders philosophy. It overwhelmingly tied the expected behavior, mission orders, to the underlying assumptions about future combat. Doctrine and professional writings spent expansive arguments on the mass and technology of a potential Soviet enemy and advocated utilizing the intangibles of combat power to compensate for material deficiency. It did not however, directly confront or supplant the underlying assumptions about commander behavior or expectations of subordinates. The NTC proved an invaluable reinforcement tool for eliciting a mission orders command philosophy. It is important to note that the behavior at the NTC did not necessitate belief. In a direct parallel to the interwar period, some expectations of commanders and subordinates remained insulated from expectations of combat, real or simulated. Beating the NTC was a popular theme in the professional journals of the period, and for some, legacy expectations of commanders still dominated their behavior. Consequently, they staunchly advocated technological or organizational changes to restore a centralized command philosophy. These centralized leaders continued to believe it was an empirically better system, despite being forced to confront its disadvantages on the battlefield of the Mojave. The power of the cultural assumptions about expected behavior forced them to rationalize their experiences as temporary. While there is clear evidence

that the army moved toward a mission orders philosophy during the case study, there is equal evidence that the legacy commander and subordinate underlying assumptions survived and continued to drive behavior in a portion of the culture. Despite numerous examples of the espoused value of a mission orders philosophy during the AirLand Battle case study, numerous examples of the “mastermind” construct still appeared.

Examining why mission orders philosophy required repeated efforts over a century reveal three sets of beliefs that guided behavior and are the foundation of a command philosophy. Taken in total the three case studies are suggestive of the temporary power of perceived combat and the more permanent power of behavioral expectations of commanders and subordinates. The perspective of history shows that regardless of the power of the current expectation of future combat, it will change and this change may necessitate a different set of behaviors. Expectations of combat are also predicated on conditions, and therefore susceptible to change. Expectations of commanders and subordinates are anchored in a timeless belief about the “best” way to operate. They may be temporarily altered to adjust for circumstance, but when the impetus is altered or removed behavior will return to harmony with permanent beliefs. They are therefore much more resistant to change. The legacy construct, which rapidly lends itself to centralized command, has endured substantively unchanged in at least a portion of the culture since before the First World War. Commanders are expected to find and order the correct solution and subordinates are expected to execute because this brings victory regardless of conditions.

It is hard to dispute this simple construct for operation and that is perhaps the best explanation for the resiliency of centralized command philosophy in the U.S. Army. It makes sense and it works. One commander and any number of subordinates is also the dominant construct for describing battle, teaching expectations, and communicating how the Army functions. However, the construct is out of date with our purported understanding of combat and has been since the 1930s. Presenting the functionality of the army as two-tiered also slants the discussion toward centralized control before it begins. There is no multi-leveled intellect interpreting, communicating, and executing to the best of its ability within intent, and this is the timeless and universal advantage a mission orders philosophy promises. It is unclear why this two-tiered construct has remained unchallenged in Army culture. Possibly, because it is an undisputedly necessary first step in our cultural indoctrination. Perhaps because it is also prevalent in other circles that exert influence in the army, for example, historians frequently seek to find the decisive leader who took an action that caused an event, and the media seeks the hero, singular, that carried the day. Regardless of the reason, it denies the existence of a chain of command that can independently think at multiple levels, and therefore increase the combat potential of the whole formation.

The solely responsible commander, who knows the appropriate solution for combat, paradigm also retards the development of a complex network of beliefs for subordinate behavior. All responsibility is on the commander. The commander in a two level construct may be anywhere from team leader to corps commander but in any position he is solely responsible and has every incentive to centralize. The subordinate

need only to execute and is relieved of all responsibility; arguably, with the onus of leadership on the commander, and no espoused responsibility in “followership”—even disobedience is the commander’s fault. Trained and trusted subordinate commanders who are armed with intent are the strength of a mission orders philosophy. Yet they have no place in a construct that is limited to only a single commander with the remainder subordinates. The commander, in such a two-tier system, is also a fallacious concept—there is no commander in the army who does not himself have a commander to answer to. A complete and better articulation of when and how a commander acts in response to his commander is lacking from these case studies.

The development of a complete and well-articulated set of behavioral expectations for subordinates is the critical requirement for the culture to expand past the historical sticking point of initiative for mission orders philosophy. While the desire for initiative in subordinates is a clear theme throughout the case studies, historically the only cultural dictum for eliciting the behavior, which appears very infrequently, is “what would the commander do if he was here”. In effect, this dictum changes the location of the commander in the two-dimensional construct to the leader taking initiative with the added danger of his commander disavowing the action. Sole responsibility is now his and his subordinates are expected to implement his decision. To inculcate a mission orders philosophy the culture requires new underlying assumptions about the subordinate that are not contingent on the commander. When leaders at all levels believe they have a responsibility to gain their commander’s trust so that they can contribute and improve

their commander's intent in execution rather than simply execute his plan: mission orders will achieve permanence.

To foster the development of these underlying assumptions first requires an unequivocal and fully developed espousal of mission orders as empirically better than centralized command. However, it is important to acknowledge the strength of centralized command when doing so. There are times when centralized command is preferable: when a unit has little training; when time has prevented the team from developing trust and effective communication; or in operations where synchronization is of such critical importance that a commander must provide how to accomplish a task in order to ensure the entire formation remains in step. However, mission orders remain a better operating system because a unit trained to mission orders intrinsically has the discipline to execute a centralized operation. On the other hand, a unit or individual trained to centralized control will greatly underperform in a situation that calls for a mission orders philosophy. This is the subtle trend evidenced by the continual complaints about lack of initiative in the historical record. Legacy expectations of commander and subordinate behavior, even with overt solicitations of initiative, quickly devolve into centralized command and disappointment in the lack of initiative. Soldiers and units cannot suddenly develop initiative nor will they run with intent the first time it is all they receive.

The current effort to promulgate mission orders appears another evolutionary step toward acceptance. Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 6-0, *Mission Command* expands on previous expectations of subordinates, and demands initiative when orders no

longer fit the situation. A less convoluted and loaded expectation than the “what would the commander do if he was here” maxim. Additionally, it places the decision in the hands of the subordinate without qualification: a large step toward the development of an expectation of behavior from subordinates that will foster mission orders. Similarly, expectations of commander behavior with less than optimal amounts of information available for decision-making are discussed to deeper level than in any previous doctrine.

However, when doctrine describes the six principles that guide commanders in exercising mission command, legacy assumptions of commander behavior and responsibility are evident. These expectations are most obvious in the principle that requires the commander to create an environment that fosters trust. Clearly, a subordinate has at least an equal responsibility to exhibit they are trustworthy. Given the historical preponderance of the two-tier command construct and downward imposition of command philosophy, a clearer indication of the commander’s responsibilities upward would help to combat the legacy underlying assumptions of command behavior and reinforce the multi-tiered nature of the chain of command. Additionally, most advocates continue to anchor their arguments to an expectation of future combat that would readily fit in AirLand Battle doctrine if “Soviet” were substituted for “hybrid” threat. If the hybrid threat, or contemporary operating environment, is forcing this change – it is unlikely to achieve permanence.

If the intention is to make lasting change in the command philosophy of U.S. Army the ideological battle will not be on the nature of future conflict but in the beliefs about how a commander should behave to bring about victory. It is doubtful that mission

orders philosophy will achieve permanence without a more developed response to the efficacy of legacy beliefs. These battle proven legacy beliefs can be summarized as: optimally one mastermind plans and orders, many subordinates execute. A cultural belief that centralized command may always work, but is suboptimal will be required to enact lasting change. Additionally, a cultural belief that centralized command does not allow units to reach maximum combat power is a requirement for an army that embraces mission orders and understands the appropriate time and place to act in a centralized manner. Historically, even as the Army has advocated changes to its conceptions of combat, the underlying assumptions driving behavior have remained the same. The legacy expectations of behavior will only be marginalized when commanders on future battlefields feel compelled to explain to their subordinates why a certain situation demands that they act in a centralized manner.

Leaders impact culture over time. Specifically, through deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching as well as responding to incidents and crises, leaders shape the culture on a daily basis. “It is not necessary for newcomers to attend special training or indoctrination sessions to learn important cultural assumptions. They become quite evident through the daily behavior of the leaders.”¹⁵⁸ However, this presumes consistency and shared understanding. Before discussing changes to training, methods of instruction, or institutional policies in support of mission orders the Army must confront and resolve the cognitive dissidence between its conception of combat and behavioral expectations of commanders. Without addressing this dissidence, our culture will never maintain the

¹⁵⁸Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 250.

consistency necessary for permanently embracing this concept, and another generation from now, a future chief of staff will again sound the call to adopt a mission orders philosophy.

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